



Sustainable Food Laboratory

FOUNDATION WORKSHOP

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Learning History

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INTRODUCTION

This first installment of the history of the Sustainable Food Laboratory was written at the end of the Foundation Workshop in Bergen, Netherlands. The Workshop was the first of five such gatherings over the course of a two-year project. The intention of this history is to use the words of the participants themselves, from the workshop and pre-workshop interviews, to describe the thinking and learning of the group at this stage in the process in order to support further reflection and learning as the work of the Food Lab goes forward.

This Learning History is intended primarily for use by participants in the Sustainable Food Lab: members of the Lab Team and Secretariat, Executive Champions, Advisors, and funders. Permission is required for any more public use.

Origins

The Sustainable Food Laboratory arose from a growing awareness of the critical nature of the economic, environmental, social, and political impacts of global food systems. There is an emerging recognition in all sectors of the food chain that humanity has yet to develop an optimal global system of food production and distribution. The Food Lab is a forum for leaders across the system to address the most pressing and significant problems of food and agriculture.

The Food Lab had its origins in the summer of 2002 at the launch of the Global Leadership Initiative, an institute dedicated to addressing the critical global challenges of our time. Over breakfast at that gathering Hal Hamilton, Don Seville, Adam Kahane, and Peter Senge started exploring the possibility that the polarized debates over agricultural sustainability might benefit from the application of the Global Leadership Initiative's "U" method, which offers a process to foster breakthrough thinking and action on complex, cross-sector problems. The conversation then expanded to include Andre van Heemstra, Jan-Kees Vis and Jeroen Bordewijk of Unilever and Oran Hesterman of the Kellogg Foundation.

Adam Kahane comments in pre-workshop interview:

"We envision that this team will be able not only to imagine breakthrough solutions but to implement solutions. In doing so, they will demonstrate that it is possible for humans to address serious global, vital, complex problem situations, and to do so peacefully, not by force."

Hal Hamilton comments in pre-workshop interview:

"This project for me is full of hope. I have no sense of just what this group will do, but I am eager for us all to take on the most difficult things we can."

Oran, Jan-Kees and Jeroen described their ongoing investments in sustainable agriculture projects and their desire to influence the mainstream, but all three expressed a sense that neither the Kellogg Foundation nor Unilever are powerful enough to do this alone.

Over the succeeding year and a half, Hal, Adam, and their colleagues at Sustainability Institute and Generon Consulting interviewed dozens of system leaders in the United States, Europe and Brazil. From these interviews, individuals were invited to join the Food Lab. The intention was to bring together entrepreneurial leaders seeking more rapid and far-reaching change in the direction of sustainability than their current efforts have achieved. The hope was that bringing together representatives from each sector of the food chain could paint a unique picture of the complexity and critical nature of the problems intrinsic in the system as a whole.

In conversations and interviews conducted over the course of assembling the Lab Team and Executive Champions, interviewees identified a variety of **systemic challenges** that the project needs to address:

- Increasing productivity while stewarding biodiversity and reducing energy use
- Enabling mass markets to incorporate environmental and social impacts of particular food production
- Enlarging market access for developing countries while protecting the future for farmers in the United States and Europe
- Protecting the health of farmers and farm workers
- Increasing opportunities for the rural poor
- Enabling smaller farmers to aggregate supply and achieve efficiencies of scale
- Attracting talent and entrepreneurship to food production
- Enabling a richer flow of information among all the

Pre-workshop Lab Team comments:

“You need the synergy of thinkers. I think it is impossible that only one small team can find answers.”

Comments in pre-workshop interviews:

“We should ask, ‘What do we want as farmer, trader, processor, consumer and human being? How can we achieve together what we want from the system we create together?’”

“There might be some possibility of creating almost an alchemical reaction with this group so that we can figure the value chain differently and interact differently.”

“Can mass markets in reality incorporate quality, including landscape and culture, in a way that is even close to what is achieved in Europe with a [regional quality] approach?”

nodes in value chains, including farmers, food businesses and consumers

Team members set the stage for this workshop by identifying these systemic challenges and by calling for new ways to think about solutions. They frequently mentioned the need to move beyond polarization and debate in regard to these challenges, as well as the need to develop solutions across perceived boundaries.

Purpose

Incorporating the advice and experience from many interviews and meetings, the Sustainable Food Lab was launched with the purpose of making mainstream food systems more sustainable. The Lab brings together leaders from businesses, governments, farm groups and non-governmental organizations with this explicit focus. Although a sustainable food system is at the heart of this work, the group realizes that perspectives on what it means to be sustainable differ substantially in the institutions, businesses, and organizations represented in the Lab. One of the challenges for the Lab Team is to use these differing perspectives and priorities as a catalyst for shared learning and significant innovations in the system.

The focus on *practical initiatives*, beginning with new or improved food supply chains, developed as a central focus of the Food Lab from the determination expressed by many Team Members and Executive Champions to make change “on the ground” through practical action, pilot projects and viable full-scale food system interventions.

The Food Lab’s logo of a plate of food emerged out of a conversation around the kitchen table of Arie van den Brand in the Netherlands. As Adam, Hal and Arie shared dinner and discussed the complexities and challenges identified by people from multiple sectors of the food system, they came to see the plate of food as representing the global complexities of

Team member comments:

“I am interested in the outcomes that people have stated repeatedly in terms of getting some kind of shared understanding of definition, getting some projects that are really about scaleable mainstreaming, and also having new ideas generated that come from the interaction of different points of view and working at the margins –these things are really critical for all of us.”

“I think it’s a big chance for me to learn a lot, also for us to build concrete projects and make concrete aims for what shall happen – not only to talk, [but] to build something.”

Lab Team Member comment in opening plenary:

“We’ve been in the last 20 years through a lot of pilot projects, a lot of meetings, and I was really attracted to this because of the verb ‘to do.’ Apparently our group using this process will do something.”

Hal Hamilton describing conversation that led to the Food Lab logo:

“We might describe the success of what we do in the Lab as increasing the sustainability of what is on the typical plates of food eaten by North Americans and Europeans. Those plates might

the food system: it is the point of connection between the people and environments that supply and consume food.

include something from a farmer just down the road and something made from soy from Brazil. So, we imagine that in the food that we eat are embodied many qualities, characteristics, circumstances, dilemmas and problems.”

Who

The Lab Team is composed of individuals from three continents and multiple sectors in the food system. They are people with a demonstrated ability to make change on the ground and who have expressed a high level of frustration about the current state of the system. They embody a wide range of experience and expertise, including global and regional policy development and implementation, product development and certification, regional branding of products, developing farmer cooperatives, integrating and advocating for environmental and social policies, and developing financial incentive programs addressing many dimensions of food systems.

Three principal groups support the work of the Lab Team: Executive Champions, Advisors, and the Secretariat. The Executive Champions are chief executives or senior officers of the companies and organizations with which team members are affiliated. These Champions provide feedback, credibility, and support for mobilizing further resources as laboratory projects take shape.

The Advisors are resource persons. They are experts who provide advice, research support, or intellectual input to the Lab Team.

The Secretariat is the professional support for the Lab and is provided by Sustainability Institute and Generon Consulting. Sustainability Institute (SI) is a non-profit research and consulting group that uses systems analysis and organizational learning to help a broad array of organizations become more strategic. Generon is an international process-consulting firm with extensive experience in tri-sector dialogue and action.

How

The design of this Lab is based on methods for deep innovation that have been developed and applied over the last 20 years by a group of action researchers now associated with the Global Leadership Initiative. In his welcoming statement at the Foundation Workshop, Adam Kahane characterized the “U” process to be used in the Food Lab as having three phases: diverging, emerging and converging. This initial workshop focused primarily on the *diverging* phase—that of exploring the varied perspectives and priorities within the team in order to understand the complexity of current reality in the food system. Subsequent workshops will focus on the *emerging* phase—that of seeing what sense can be made of the complexity of the system—and the *converging* phase, in which the group understanding and work coalesce into practical initiatives.

Adam further explained that the problems in the food system, as in any complex system, exhibit high *dynamic, social and generative complexity*.

Dynamic complexity occurs when cause and effect are separated in space and time. For example, consumer taste in Belgium impacts coffee production in Guatemala, and determinations about land tenure and agricultural practices made 20 years ago affect current opportunities.

Generative complexity occurs when the situation itself is fundamentally unfamiliar. Old solutions may no longer be useful in our age of globalization, new technology, new communications, and new networks. In an unfamiliar situation, using the best practices from the past won’t necessarily solve the problems.

Finally, high *social complexity* is evident when influential people in the system have fundamentally different views of what is going on, and about what matters. When addressing such situations, the participation of diverse stakeholders makes possible a comprehensive understanding of current reality and allows the group to identify significant leverage points for change.

The Foundation Workshop does not stand alone, but is one chapter in the development of an innovative approach and

Adam Kahane:

"If we already knew the solution, then we wouldn't need any of this. We would simply move from where we are to where we want to be. Many of you have tried to do that and you're here because there's something you're trying to do that's beyond what you can do by simply reacting within your own institutions. That's the simple basis for this project: to bring together people from different parts of the system to try to understand the current reality and bring forward a new one."

Adam Kahane:

"We talk about deeper levels of response, changing the structure of the system, redesigning the system, changing how we think about the system...and ultimately that is the purpose of what we're doing."

outcome in the field of sustainable food systems. Between workshops, and in subsequent sessions, the project will build on the information, process and relationships that were launched in the initial workshop.

Brief Overview

The remainder of this history is organized around (a) the content of the workshop sessions; (b) the group dynamics which support and feed the spirit of the Lab; and (c) the questions and tensions raised in the Foundation Workshop that will inform the ongoing work of the group.

The content work of the Lab Team was focused mainly on developing a collective understanding of the current reality of food systems. The plenary sessions provided a framework for this work by exploring a broad range of ideas and perspectives on the **Challenges** in the food system (Appendix A), the **Indicators** of sustainability in a food chain (Appendix B), and **Current Initiatives** that are successful or of interest to sustainable food systems (Appendix C). The experience of current reality was further deepened through Mini-Learning Journeys and discussions related to the food served at the workshop.

The Lab Team also developed two lists outlining their agendas for the time between this workshop and the November gathering. These took the form of a **Learning Agenda** (Appendix E) and a **Research Agenda** (Appendix F). The Learning Agenda focuses on action-learning experiments we can do now, and the people and places Team Members want to learn more about on Learning Journeys. The Research Agenda outlines research Team Members think would support learning at this time, as well as resources Team Members have to offer each other.

Less tangibly, but equally important, a degree of collective understanding developed in the group with regard to the nature of a sustainable food system. There appeared to be a common, broadly-framed working understanding of a sustainable food system as one which **produces enough food to feed people affordably, nutritionally, and safely in a way that sustains the economic, environmental, and social**

Team Member comments:

“We are here because we would like to have this food of higher quality with competitive price [while] defending the environment and the social culture.”

systems in which the food system is embedded.

Despite a sense of general agreement on a broadly framed working definition, the Lab Team maintained considerable difference in the key details of sustainable food systems. For example, Lab Team members interpret the practical meaning of “enough food,” “affordably,” and “safely” quite differently. Similarly, many of the discussions at the workshop focused on differing perspectives as to the appropriate **balance of priorities** for economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability and for practical **criteria for success**.

Another notable development in the spirit of the gathering occurred within the realm of the shared intention of the group. In pre-workshop interviews and in the opening round of the workshop, a number of Lab Team members spoke of oppositional debates and polarized perspectives within the food system. Over the course of the workshop, the perception of these differences as oppositional dissipated significantly, and for many, those differences became the basis instead for an increased appreciation of the complexity of the current reality.

By the final day of the Foundation Workshop, many Lab Team members voiced deep appreciation for each other. They also shared their hope for significant system change, even while recognizing the magnitude of the challenges facing the food system. The comments of a number of Team Members refer to an appreciation for what became a shared set of questions and challenges, when they had initially expected to agree on a set of shared answers. In addition, a number of people expressed surprise at how much they learned, and attributed that to the range of experience and knowledge present in the Lab Team, as well as to the attitude of curiosity and openness that was cultivated in the workshop.

This first report of the Sustainable Food Lab Learning History aims to capture both the emerging areas of agreement and the diversity of thought, and by doing so help sustain the creative tension that emerged in the Foundation Workshop.

“What stands out is that we lack the framework and common definition of what a sustainable, active food system is. There’s not a common understanding among the stakeholders of sustainable food production. I think we still need to look for that baseline, that common definition of understanding and agreement. What is our view on mainstream, sustainable, agri-food systems?”

Pre-workshop interviews with Team Members:

“This [project] is about tying players together who had been adversarial, and finding a better outcome for everybody.”

Team member comments:

“...there has been among the team a very high level of willingness to learn and listen to other people, which again is something I find impressive with such a wide range of backgrounds that we have.”

“We have experienced a profound level of trust and openness [which shows] that we can be very comfortable talking about our disagreements and our differences because we’ve built a relationship around common values. I have no question in my mind that we share more common values than we have differences.”

“...something that I had not quite expected—the diversity of thought, the diversity of feeling, the diversity of definition of sustainability.”

EXPLORING CURRENT REALITY

The principal work of Lab Team in this workshop focused on developing a collective understanding of the current reality of the food system.

This work was organized around exercises that explored the **Challenges** in the food system (Appendix A), **Indicators** of sustainability in a food chain (Appendix B), promising **Current Initiatives** (Appendix C), mini-Learning Journeys, and small group discussions.

Several questions emerged from these exercises which framed the central work that occurred during the Foundation Workshop:

- Is it possible or desirable to develop a consensus on a **definition of sustainability** in this group?
- Can the group accomplish significant change without that consensus?
- Is **hunger** a result of the structure of current food systems or is it a function of poverty? Do issues of hunger and equity fall within the scope of this project?
- How much alignment do we have, and how much do we need to have, in order to achieve significant results in terms of **balancing economic, social and environmental dimensions** of a sustainable food system?
- How much alignment do we have, and do we need to have, as we develop a **vision for success**?

Both in early interviews and in the opening plenary session, many Team Members expressed the need for group agreement on answers to these questions, and anticipated that such agreement would be difficult if not impossible to achieve. However, while the very divergent perspectives in the group regarding these questions did not seem to change over the course of the workshop, it is significant to note the emergence of a sense of shared urgency and determination to address the problems these questions raise.

Learning Historian comment:

There is perhaps the most potential for action where there is the most alignment. Yet when a group develops alignment around an idea, it is often accompanied by an increased sense of knowing and less curiosity about alternatives. Conversely, there may be the most potential for learning and innovation where there is the least alignment. This tension between learning and knowing was notably animated throughout this workshop.

Team Member comments:

“Our value is [in] the diversity of our experiences and approaches and how could we make that emerge in an organized manner. My concern was that we will be very splintered.”

Defining Sustainability

From the outset, many Lab Team members indicated that the lack of a shared definition of what is meant by “sustainability” was a major challenge for both the food system and the Food Lab. The frustration around this surfaced in Team Member comments during the both the Challenges exercise and the work on Indicators. In the report-out sessions in both of those exercises, Team Members identified the need for a common understanding of sustainability in a food system. They called for substantive discussion of this topic, suggesting that without such agreement it would be difficult, if not impossible, to create significant practical initiatives.

On the first day of the workshop, Team Members were asked to write down what they perceive to be the biggest **Challenges** related to sustainability for food supply chains. This exercise revealed very different, sometimes contradictory definitions of the problems facing the system. The Challenges exercise served, nonetheless, to build a foundation of understanding about some concrete aspects of moving toward sustainability. A few examples from the extensive list of challenges developed by the Team include:

- Motivating through the business case
- Removing trade distortions
- Preventing deterioration of natural resources
- Stimulating demand
- Increasing market access
- Improving coordination across the supply chain

Team Member comments:

“... it hit me that there’s a lack of shared meaning about what’s sustainable, and without a shared meaning that seems like that’s going to be a huge challenge . . . across the whole system.”

“We still lack the framework and the common definition of what is a sustainable, active food system. There are parts of it now and then. I find it difficult establishing indicators before I know what the indicators are supposed to indicate to whom. I think we still need to look for that baseline, that common definition of understanding and agreement. I would very much welcome a discussion on that.”

Team Members explain their contributions to the Challenges exercise:

“The biggest challenge is to change the policy framework for rural development and trade.”

“Our biggest problem is access to distribution and to the distribution system by the small-scale farmer.”

“My challenge would be to develop an international trade and agricultural policy allowing for sustainable food supply chains.”

“I would say the challenge is over-production in rich countries.”

“We want to recognize financially which businesses will be sustainable, which will grow, and which we can understand and recognize as profitable.”

“So, we’re constantly working to make this case more financially viable, and

- Enabling/promoting sustainable farming practices
- Setting standards for new markets
- Developing a shared understanding of “sustainable”

sometimes you can do that where the consumers are willing to pay a premium (like the organic, perhaps) but very often sustainably-produced products do, in fact, cost more.”

“My biggest challenge is for large production of soy beans in the Cerrado, which is the Brazilian grasslands. It is to sensitise and create partnerships with major companies to demand soy beans that are produced economically, socially and in a way that is environmentally friendly.”

“My point is very simple: it is loss of soil carbon and organic matter.”

“The biggest challenge, which I know you won’t agree with, is world agricultural dumping.” [‘Dumping’ refers to selling goods at less than their cost of production. The difference in price is subsidized by governments, generally in developed countries, thereby driving down world market prices and disadvantaging producers in countries that are unable or unwilling to subsidize commodities.]

“In Europe, issues of major concern are health, safety, space, and rural development. The challenge is how you shift instrumentation of farm policy towards those objectives.”

The exercise on creating **Indicators of Sustainability** contributed to a developing sense of shared intention, despite a lack of agreement on a specific definition of sustainability and a lack of consensus around particular indicators. Lab Members did agree, however, on the desirability of having indicators and on the qualities that would make a set of indicators effective:

Team Member comments:

*“If a system can feed more people, then you should say it is **more** sustainable, but this does not define what **is** sustainable.”*

“If you distribute bad products, I think it is not sustainable.”

“My expectations are quite high in that I

- High-quality indicators will be
 - Few
 - Cost effective
 - Measurable
 - Related to marketing
 - Proxies for several issues
- They should link to underlying values and ethics
- They need to be a balanced a set, which may contain some contradictions

Finally, the group suggested that although a higher-level framework is good, the local application of specific indicators would need to be flexible.

Both the exercise on Challenges and the one on Indicators resulted in an increased appreciation of the difficulty of achieving a single definition of sustainability, or of capturing a single, commonly accepted picture of a sustainable food system. Several Lab Team members suggested that the group address the most crucial problems first, thereby moving the focus from defining a specific, precise goal to advancing a direction for action.

Lab Team members wondered throughout the three days how much alignment about sustainability would be necessary in order to act effectively together. An initial inclination to narrow the differences in the room through a process of agreeing on a definition of sustainability transformed into surprise and appreciation during the closing round of the workshop for the range of experience and perspectives present in the group. Several team members pointed out the necessity of bringing diversity of knowledge and expertise to bear on issues as complex as those in the food supply system. Many participants noted that to some extent the differences themselves created opportunities for each person to listen,

think this is a great opportunity to try and share some common views. I agree we won't have uniformity. I'm interested in how we can actually make sustainability a mainstream market proposition where people can make money and the benefits can be shared. I hope we can find some common ground in doing that work."

Team Member comments:

"Many people brought up this question, 'Can't we get more precise about what we mean by sustainability? How we would know we were becoming more or less?' I don't think we will solve this once and for all, but we are gradually building up a shared language for talking about this."

"I am interested in arriving at a dynamic perspective on sustainability that has history attached to it, rather than a horizontal kind of standards-based approach."

"Let's be more sustainable today than yesterday and less than we will be tomorrow."

"If you want to understand a complex issue and if you want to produce meaningful responses, you need to mobilize a variety of types of knowledge or experiences or expertise. So, I see the process starting today as an opportunity for collective learning to address a complex issue."

"I don't really understand what sustainability is yet. I thought I did when

learn, and add to the collective knowledge in the room, even if the result wasn't alignment.

This issue of how much alignment is needed for effective action will continue to remain an open question for the Lab Team.

I came here, but after listening to 36 different people, I understand that sustainability means something different to a lot of people."

The Role of "Have-Nots" in Food Systems

One of the persistent themes of the workshop was a concern about the "have-nots"—people essentially left out of the global economy. For some, this group was defined by hunger, while for others the criteria included access to land or bargaining power in markets.

This concern was woven throughout the session on Indicators, and began to be recognized as a complex challenge in the minds of many Lab Team members. A few participants said that indicators of social equity in the food system would be the most difficult to develop. Others felt that an appropriate indicator would be trends in the distribution of income from food chains (e.g. how much of the food dollar goes to smaller producers and farm workers).

While all agreed that sustainable food systems must have sufficient capacity to feed the growing population of the world, not all felt that hunger and poverty, per se, fell within the scope of this project. For this group, the responsibility for solving hunger and poverty was framed as a political or social problem rather than a food system issue.

As occurred with discussions of many issues during the workshop, some degree of initial polarization on this topic gave way to a growing collective appreciation for the complexity of the problem. Team Members repeatedly referred to hunger, equity, and distribution of income as key concerns, and some shared their deep, personal commitment to these subjects. As a result, these concerns seemed to take on a new significance. They were not resolved, but in the closing plenary session several Team Members voiced a sense of shared recognition of their importance for humanity.

Team Member comments:

"One of 3 critical needs is for better re-distribution of wealth [so that we] eradicate hunger and malnutrition. I don't know how, but one way forward is to build an enormous body of will... that it is not acceptable to allow people to be hungry or experience malnutrition. Not to just mildly comment on it, but to get people passionately committed to changing it."

"Related to the hunger problem in the world is how do we improve access to good food or how to improve access to food at all? That's dealing with the hunger issue."

"Several of our colleagues here have said, 'It's very important that we bring poverty into this agenda, and that we distribute the value added within that production chain' But some of the people in the world today are not even part of that production chain because they don't consume anything. So it would be a big failure if we exclude these people from our conversation."

Learning Historian Observation:

The dynamic of moving from polarized perspectives to a shared appreciation for the magnitude and complexity of the issue was a theme that wove throughout much of this workshop. Team Members experienced this shift at different times and about different topics, but it surfaced as a strong undercurrent and coalesced, by the final plenary session, into a collective sense of respect for the valuable perspectives and strong commitment of the Team Members. It also enhanced, for many, the depth of understanding of various aspects of current reality in food systems.

Balancing Economic, Social, and Environmental Dimensions of Sustainable Food Systems

At the most general level, team members indicated that changes in the food system are necessary in order for the system to be healthy. Team members also referred repeatedly to the need to balance **social, environmental, and economic** dimensions of sustainability. That being said, Lab Team members expressed markedly differing perspectives on the relative importance of each of these three dimensions. For example, some people felt the environment is in dangerous decline and is the most important priority for action if the food system is to survive the next century. Others described the economic challenges for all sectors of the food chain as the most immediate problem to be solved. Still others indicated that the loss of small and medium-sized producers would be an un-recoverable loss and is the single most pressing problem in the system.

Differing priorities for balancing these three dimensions in the current system emerged as the area of significant divergence during the workshop.

When addressing the **economic** dimension of sustainability, there was little consensus on:

- The degree to which this is a problem in the current reality
- Whether and where leverage could or should be applied

Team Member comments:

“I think that most of us noted that the most important three doors we have here are the well-known triple “P” – the profit, the planet and the people—and I think that every interest who is coming here is related to profit or to planet or to people or to a certain balance or combination, but at least all agree that we are talking about the ‘Three P’s.’”

“Talking isn’t going to do it, if you can’t communicate. We have to have numbers about how it [sustainability] can mainstream a business case.”

“We felt that in the system as a whole, if this approach [incentivizing sustainable production] is to be viable at all, it’s going to manifest itself sustainably through economic activity.”

- The nature of an economically sustainable system

For example, several Lab Team members described an unequal and unfair distribution of financial returns along food chains, with farm workers and farmers the most disadvantaged. Others voiced the opinion there was little point in talking about any aspect of the system that could not present a viable business case.

Others talked about the “old paradigms” of free market capitalism and government intervention as no longer working well, but were not able to offer a clear vision of a new paradigm. One team member referred to a “vacuum in thinking” in this regard across the political spectrum.

A few of the systemic challenges within the economic dimension of sustainability identified by the Lab Team members included:

- Making the business case for sustainability
- The current system support for “unsustainable foods”
- The current free trade agenda, which is seen by some as discriminatory

Although team members frequently spoke about the need for food systems to operate in such a way as to avoid depleting the **environmental** resources of the planet, there were many comments that indicated a lack of consensus around the following questions:

- How critical are environmental problems?
- To what extent are agriculturally caused environmental problems irreversible?
- Will technological innovations and best practice adoption be sufficient to meet environmental

“Farm legislation in the United States and Europe should enable a more fair share of added value to return to the rural regions, small farmers, and poor consumers.”

“On both the left and right of the political spectrum there is no new paradigm for what role government should play. There is a vacuum in thinking.”

“We think, for example, of fertile soil, of water and all those kinds of issues. This, of course, is for the benefit of society at large. We have to make sure that we do not take away the opportunities for future generations. That’s what the whole course of this is all about.”

“There is a whole world that doesn’t think there is a problem. Somehow you have to rope in that worldview, that the system will adjust and everything will be cleaned up without intervention.”

“People who believe GMOs cause ‘Frankenfoods’ have no perception that earth and all species do this naturally.”

challenges?

- What is the relative importance of environmental problems compared to other issues, particularly issues of equity?

Lab Team members expressed compelling but different perspectives on the role of the environment in a sustainable food system. Although there was general agreement that preserving the natural resource base of the planet was essential to a functioning food system, perceptions of the state of the environment were very different. Views ranged from a feeling of urgency around an environment perceived as being in sharp decline to a statement of willingness to destroy the “last butterfly” in order to alleviate human starvation.

Lastly, Team Members articulated many perspectives about **social** issues as they relate to the food system. Although the facts referred to by Team Members didn’t seem to be in dispute (e.g., low margins for producers of all kinds, challenges for agricultural communities and farm workers), people expressed differing perspectives on the significance of these trends, their inevitability, and their potential for change.

Lab Team members described social issues using words like “inclusiveness,” “fair trade,” “fair share.” The role of labor and farm workers was noted often. Some members view farm labor and labor unions as a significant problem in the food system, while others view them as a necessary part of any meaningful solution. Some identified fair trade policies as necessary to allow small farmers and rural areas to realize an adequate income, while others described this same type of policy as a threat to a sustainable food system.

Several Team Members implied that establishing goals for social equity is impossible and that current trends are inevitable. For example, after the workshop mini-Learning Journeys, one participant noted that many of the small farms they visited were on the edge of disappearing, and that this seemed unavoidable.

At the same time that these substantive perspectives were put on the table, some Team Members expressed concern that the

All we are doing is trying to design into plants genes which are helpful for helping plants produce what humans need.”

“I can tell you that people die from starvation. Nothing is more desperate than a refugee camp. I would kill the last butterfly on earth if it meant feeding a starving child.”

“I am expecting to be able to work with a group of people who have a sense of urgency regarding the fact that our environment is in precipitous decline.”

Small-group spokesperson in Indicators of Sustainability exercise:

“We flagged the fact that social criteria are often the ones that drop out, that in the marketplace the economic and environmental dimensions are much more present and rewarded than the social dimension. We flagged that as an issue.”

Team Member Comments:

“Well, a successful project or a successful case for me would be where the workers that are going to be needed to carry that project out will actually be part of the development of that project, and the workforce will not be [considered what] in the US they call a ‘special interest.’”

“We have to make trade fair, to allow small farmers to earn a living under fair-trade policies.”

“Half the farms our team visited were on the edge of disappearing... We sensed a dead end.”

“We need to make sure that our successes are explainable and communicable to

agenda of the Food Lab might become too big to be accomplished and too risky to be palatable to some of the organizations represented in the team. One member cautioned that the Food Lab could be seen as a risk to other groups and businesses also working on sustainability in the food system.

others and that we are not seen as a risk to the organizations already involved in sustainability actions. For the sake of relationship management we need to take that into account.”

The Food Lab provides a unique opportunity to hold all these perspectives in the same room. As one team member commented before the Foundation Workshop, the lack of understanding across the system results in structural dysfunction. The Foundation Workshop initiated new relationships on a scale that has the potential to make a difference, although this workshop marked only the beginning of a two-year project and revealed many chasms yet to be bridged.

“Different parts of the system are opaque to other parts, so people develop articulations of what they think others are doing and attribute motives to them. This results in insufficient curiosity across the system. This becomes structural and people take sides. We lack the appropriate scale and relationships that might bridge the levels.”

Experiencing Food Systems

In this workshop the Team also connected with the food system through two concrete experiences, both of which prepared the ground for our future engagement with the underlying issues. The food we ate, as well as visits to food-related businesses and farms near Bergen, were key elements in the workshop experience, although neither was synthesized into the full-group discussions.

Before dinner each evening the chef described the menu in detail, including what he knew of the source of various ingredients, the production methods, and the producers. These reports instigated many table conversations about wide-ranging issues such as consumer preference, locally produced food, and the role of transportation in environmental/social dimensions of sustainable food. For example, the Alaskan salmon, Dutch steak, and chocolate cake served the first evening inspired conversations that included curiosity about the imbedded energy costs for transporting food, international management of fisheries, and whether life-without-chocolate is a sustainable concept. The menu on the second evening, which featured a traditional shrimp that is caught in Dutch waters, sent to Morocco and/or Poland for peeling by lower-wage workers and then shipped back to the Netherlands, generated discussions about the paradoxes contained the concept of “local” food.

Similarly, the mini-Learning Journeys sparked lively discussions in small groups around issues that were not specifically addressed in plenary discussions. They involved dividing the group into six teams, each of which was asked to be open to perceiving new aspects of the whole food system by visiting local people involved in the food chain.

The Dutch Lab Team member who organized the visits reminded the group that farmers and growers have a very specific learning style. Unlike intellectuals—who first read, then write, then talk, and lastly go out to observe—farmers first see, then process what they have observed, and only possibly much later write about their experience. He challenged the Lab Team to experiment with learning in the style of the farmer. He outlined a learning agenda for each visit follows:

- Shopping in Alkmaar. Visit a regular supermarket, an organic grocery and an organic meat butcher. See what is on the shelf. Ask where products are from. Roughly calculate and compare the travel-miles and external costs.
- Modern dairy farm. Explore how the farmer and his brother, as young entrepreneurs, imagine the future in terms of sustainable development and how they see the next 10 years evolving for their farm.
- 200 year-old family-owned coffee and tea trader with a Sustainable business philosophy. Find out what inspired them to be “sustainable” thirty years before the philosophy was discussed in business circles.
- Greenhouse visits—large-scale rose production versus small, entrepreneurial greenhouse Freesias. Contrast globalisation and industrialisation of flower cultivation with a new business’s radically different definition of success in the same domain.
- Visits to a grower of eco-onions, a regional marketing cooperative, and a spinach grower with direct delivery to the supermarket. Contrast the business models of cooperatives versus direct-delivery producers.

Team Member comments following the Learning Journeys:

“It is very difficult from local experience to try to derive generalizations, which is the main problem. It’s very easy to solve the problems we saw [on the Learning Journeys], but that was [observing] individual actions, not the general approach to sustainability [in global food systems].”

“After our [Learning Journey], it felt to me like Albert Einstein’s quote, ‘No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.’ There have been lots of conversations [about] the whole system for years but we’re going to need to find a way to step away from that – to perhaps rise to another level of thinking and dialoguing about how the whole system functions. For example, some of the parts that people wanted to have fixed [on Learning Journeys] are probably symptoms of an unsustainable whole system, and just trying to fix them won’t get us where we want to be.”

“I had the impression that in the Learning Journeys we had a very interesting and inspiring program. It is one thing to reflect upon sustainable food production and debate about potential solutions, but it’s another thing to stay in touch with the daily practices and the reality of food production. I think there’s a lot to say for the continued combination, because I think it might lead to a fruitful discussion. Over a cup of coffee with Group 5 we had a very interesting debate on the basis of the experiences of our visits to the shops and it worked out quite well. So, let’s not stay out of touch with reality.”

- Farm visit to marginalized or “handicapped” area. Experience survival strategies around marketing the protection of birds, water storage, green tourism and environmental education as part of farm business model.

Both the discussions inspired by the actual food we ate and the conversations in and around the Learning Journeys enriched the Lab Teams explorations of the current reality of food systems.

GROUP DYNAMICS: FROM POLARIZATION TO SHARED INTENT

The Sustainable Food Lab intentionally convenes a group that sees things from the perspective of different geographies, sectors, and histories in order to achieve changes more ambitious than any individual or institution could achieve separately. One of the primary challenges in bringing together people with this kind of diversity is how to use these differences as a catalyst for achieving significant systemic innovations.

In a number of areas, Team Members entered this project expecting to confront historically polarized positions, such as those between environmentalists and business interests, between the first and the third world in trade negotiations, and between small/medium-sized producers and agribusiness interests. A number of Team Members anticipated that polarization around these and other issues would impede the work of the Food Lab.

Although the tangible work of the Food Lab brought forward many of these differing perspectives, the group attitude toward difference itself seemed to shift over the course of the Bergen Workshop. Team Members noted two specific areas in which **respect and trust increased**: (1) attitudes toward change, and (2) attitudes toward the ability of this diverse group of people to work effectively together.

Team Member comment:

“Diversity is a necessary precondition for making progress.”

“I think that if by 2006 we can get ourselves to address our organizational clothes [loyalties] and create some empathy for what the other one or the other parties are thinking, that would be a huge thing.”

Pre-workshop interview with Team Member:

“We know that it’s not possible to solve the problem with only the states or only the companies or only civil society, and we have pushed for this process with this variety of people as partners. I have high hope that the new innovative process will put some very different people together to try to solve some problems.”

“We need to make more explicit within the project a set of guiding principles and values that would guide this group forward above our individual values, assumptions and perspectives. In the absence of such a set of principles, ‘everything goes.’ We all respect each other, but that’s not enough.”

In pre-workshop interviews, Lab Team Members were asked what they felt were the biggest challenges facing food systems. Many expressed concern about the intentions and/or willingness of whole sectors of the food system to change. This unwillingness was attributed to “players in the system,” powerful political lobbies, corporations, consumers, and other Lab Team members. Several Team Members feared that differing attitudes toward the need for system change might hamper the group’s ability to agree on definitions of the problems, on strategies for intervention, and on practical initiatives.

A number of people used the word “impossible” in regard to the magnitude of the change needed in the food system. Others saw this challenge as particularly interesting and indicated that the diversity in the Lab Team contributed to their sense of potential for creating change.

Contributing to the skepticism about change in general, several Team Members asked whether personal commitment was sufficient to affect system or institutional change. These Lab Members said they doubted the ability of individuals to affect the institutions in which they work, even when the individuals were committed to doing so. However, comments by others made it clear that not everyone shared this sense of the limited impact of individual leadership.

Lab Team comments:

“Players in system don’t want to change.”

“These [trade issues] are essentially political issues in which you have political interests that don’t want to change [and] powerful lobbies in Washington that don’t care about a sustainable world-wide system.”

“Consumers might be willing to think about [sustainability] when buying a Toyota, but not when buying \$1 worth of bread. Consumers are not thinking about social justice and they are unwilling to think about it.”

“To do anything on a global basis and for the whole food chain seems to be a very difficult, if not impossible, final result.”

“This project has the potential for a breakthrough like we’ve never seen before....and that is the creation of such compelling and successful prototypes that they attract more attention, more resources, and more energy than any of us in this room can imagine. I really believe that the people in this room and the process that we have in front of us makes that possible.”

Team Member comments:

“We are global players coming together as a global group dealing with an enormous challenge. We are trying the impossible. Still, we are powerful players.”

“This is a moment full of opportunity for change.”

“...it is important to see that those in the group are human beings and they can't change what they are doing in their workplace too quickly.”

In terms of the ability of this diverse group of people to work effectively together, many Lab Team Members again used the word “impossible” to describe the possibility of achieving open dialogue and deep learning. Some Team Members attributed this difficulty to the likelihood of polarization in a group this diverse.

Balancing those doubts, other Team Members saw the Team's diversity as an asset that would enable the Food Lab to achieve more meaningful changes. In the same vein, some Team Members talked about the necessity of bringing together previous adversaries in order to achieve system innovations.

Over the course of the workshop, many Team Members began to view the differences within the group less as polarized and more as an opportunity to enrich the group understanding of the challenges in food systems. The differences themselves were not necessarily resolved, but the perception that these differences needed to be reconciled before the group could agree on practical initiatives seemed to soften.

This change was brought about in part by the personal stories shared by a number of Team Members after dinner one evening, in which they expressed the source of their commitment to work in food systems. These stories revealed deep personal commitment to human life, to the earth, and to something beyond individual agendas. They also revealed a sense of urgency about the need for change in the global system and in the way humans relate to the earth and to each other. This sharing dissipated some of the initial doubt about individuals and their motives. It provided inspiration for many, and it also re-framed the difficulties of an individual trying to change a system as an opportunity for valuable collaboration within the group.

Team Member recounting a conversation with an officer of the World Bank:

“...and I told him about this project in its early form, and he said, 'Impossible. It can't be done.' He said, 'Obviously you don't know much about food. This really is the most polarized subject there is. You can't get a group who can work together on this.'”

Post-workshop Team member comment:

“Marked by my experience of other peoples' misery in starvation, I developed little patience for those that I used to describe as 'naturebas' [Portuguese slang for environmentalists/organics proponents]. During the three useful days, I have learned that we share the same [goals for humanity], which is where our parallelism converges.”

Team Members on the source of their commitment to this work:

“I decided to do everything I could to save even one life.”

“It feels to me that I am becoming related back to my deepest roots in doing this work.”

“I worked there with people who didn't have a third-grade education but they were experts in being people, in love, in what it means to care. They taught me about the real connectedness of natural systems. After that experience I was changed.”

In addition, the Team heard from those who are part of some of the largest global businesses and institutions in food systems. These Team Members expressed their deep concern that they are not powerful enough individually to accomplish the changes they feel are needed. Team Members representing other important sectors, governments, and institutions shared this frustration.

Adam Kahane reminded the Team that in the diverging phase of the “U” process there is no expectation of resolving differences and that the highly complex problems in food systems are difficult to solve by simply applying old solutions. His comments served to support the emerging shared recognition within the Lab Team of the commitment, curiosity, and collective challenge before them.

In both small-group sessions and plenary sessions, Team Members began to express appreciation for the attitude of openness to learning and respectful listening that developed around contradictory and differing points of view. Many also voiced surprise at their own deepening awareness of the complexity in the system and at the tone of respect and curiosity that developed in the Lab Team over the course of this initial meeting.

Although a number of Team Members spoke of new appreciation for what they learned and for the diversity of perspectives in the Team, some questions about process still remain:

- How much agreement is necessary and desirable for successful innovation?

Opening remarks of Executive Champion, CEO of international foods business:

“I’m not suggesting that we can resolve these issues or assault these issues alone, but what we can try to do is to be part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. That’s why within our company we have chosen to be part of this project.”

Convener Adam Kahane:

“There may be times you feel overwhelmed with just so many ideas, so many perspectives and nothing resolved. If that happens, nothing’s wrong. Don’t be alarmed. This is the process we’re using. And this is the joy and challenge of working in such a diverse group.”

Team Member comment:

“My surprise is that – given that I’ve thought a lot about sustainable food system—my thinking has gotten far beyond where I thought before. I didn’t expect to move that far.”

“I was surprised by the fact that after two-and-one-half days, some sort of shared understanding has emerged despite us coming from very, very different backgrounds. I think part of the reason for that is that there has been among the team a very high level of willingness to learn and listen to other people. I think that is quite impressive.”

Team Member comment:

“The key work of this group is not to write a report of agreed principles but to search and find, from a systemic point of view, the entry points ... for shifting the larger system, and then to act at those entry points, although not necessarily with agreed actions.”

- Is it possible for successful innovations to shift the system on a global scale?
- How do we ensure that the voices at the edges remain in the dialogue?

These questions will inform the group’s work of creating practical initiatives together.

BALANCING PRAGMATISM AND LEARNING

Participants in the Foundation Workshop displayed both pragmatism and vision; both urgency and a desire to learn from one another. On the one hand, most Lab Team members are entrepreneurial “doers” and inherently frustrated with theorizing. On the other hand, many experience the Food Lab as a rich opportunity to learn from leaders with vastly different experience and perspectives.

As the Team participated in the development of the list of **Current Initiatives** (Appendix C) and the list of resources offered in the **Research Agenda** (Appendix E), they became increasingly interested in the practical initiatives others were implementing in the field. For example: Lab Members have designed certification systems for sustainably produced seafood, timber and vegetables. Some are experienced with branding of regionally specific products. Some have created product specification initiatives for their company’s supply chains. Others have supported cooperatives of small producers to gain economies of scale. Lab Team members represent small, medium-sized and very large businesses, as well as government agencies and important nongovernmental organizations that serve social or environmental public interests. As the list of current initiatives developed it fuelled a sense of urgency within the group to begin defining the practical work of the Food Lab.

However the desire among some members of the Food Lab to move directly into the action phase of the project was balanced by calls for patience by a number of others on the Team.

Team Members:

“... my hope is that we stay with the vision and that we not be impatient with the ‘do, do, do’ because in the drive to make something super-concrete, there frequently is a tendency to move toward concrete, but things end up being superficial.”

“I think that what impressed me the most was the amount of experience, capacities and resources that are in this group, but not only in this group but what’s behind us – the networks that we have access and potential for each one of us – it’s amazing to make an inventory of what we have.”

“Change toward sustainability has to go faster. We’ll never get everything solved at once, and so we should try and change first what everyone agrees is the worst

Specifically, several Team Members argued that agreement on the nature of the problem and the nature of the solution should be a prerequisite for determining action by the group.

The tension between enacting practical initiatives and deepening a collective understanding of current reality is precisely the dynamic the “U” process is designed to balance and enhance. Because this project engages an experienced, highly knowledgeable multi-sector team in developing practical initiatives, it comes as no surprise that this dynamic existed as a significant undercurrent in the gathering. It will likely continue to percolate through Lab Team conversations during Learning Journeys and in the Retreat.

A shared sense of urgency, a mutually reinforcing depth of commitment to the future, and a collective eagerness to get to work on practical initiatives created, in some sense, a feeling of cohesion in the assembled group. Although this urgency to “do something” was an important dynamic in the group, it did not obscure the very real differences in perspective present. It did contribute to the overall attitude of respectful listening, appreciation, and curiosity that allowed significant differences to emerge.

The level of experience and expertise in the Team creates both enormous opportunity and a challenge to extend the boundaries of “knowing” for the group. Many members of the group were familiar with the difficulty of maintaining curiosity and an attitude of learning while engaging in a course of action. There appeared to be some sense that the tension between ‘learning’ and ‘doing’ contributes to the potential for

problem.”

“I think I’m here now and I expect that some others are here because we don’t feel like we’re doing enough.”

“...how to address what I think is a very real tension between the desire to get going and do something and at the same time realizing that we really don’t have a common understanding yet of what the situation is, and if we can’t agree on what the problem is, it’s hard to agree on what the solution is.”

“I’m not interested in pilot projects. I’m interested in blowing this stuff [practical initiatives] out full bore. So, I would like to see some real solutions come out of this.”

“How can this move into a doing mode? I think a lot of us have come with that anticipation that something is going to be done and we’re not going to sit there talking, and I know we have to go through the reflection process, but I think a lot of us want to see real, concrete progress in the process.”

“I also contribute a real sense of urgency – I don’t believe we have another generation to just sit around and talk about it. I really have a sense of urgency that this is something we’re going to have to take action on now.”

“...this project has the potential for a break-through like we’ve never seen before in our work....and that is the creation of such compelling and successful prototypes that they attract more attention, more resources and more energy than any of us in this room can imagine.”

“...there has been among the team a very high level of willingness to learn and

important innovations to come out of this project. In the closing round, many Lab Members shared hope for significant system change, even while recognizing the magnitude of the challenges facing the food system.

listen to other people, which again is something I find impressive with such a wide range of backgrounds that we have.”

CLOSING REFLECTIONS: SUCCESS AND SURPRISES

The Foundation Workshop concluded with a round of reflections from those present, on their visions for success and on things they learned or experienced in the workshop which were unexpected. These comments give an indication of the agenda for the further work of the Food Lab, and they raise again the question of how much alignment of purpose and definition is needed for successful Food Lab innovations. One team member spoke for many when he said he hoped that the efforts of the Team would be focused enough to be practical and broad enough for maximum impact. The visions for success fall into seven categories:

1. Create innovations together, specifically those that can mainstream with a strong business case and to which we can apply the indicators of sustainability
2. Support one another as we innovate in our own situations
3. Specifically innovate in food chains for social equity
4. Create observable change in food systems, particularly consumer behavior
5. Remind one another what is important about different aspects of sustainability
6. Sustain strong relationships with one another
7. Assess actions according to how acceptable, useful, and influential they are in our organizations

Team Members:

“We have worked in the first world; we know how to do that. Success will be the development of a product that is very broad socially and economically and reaches the poor. Success is not that we sell more fancy tomatoes to some rich person on Fifth Avenue.”

“We have to have numbers about how it can mainstream a business case. Identify two or three major commodities to mainstream, including considerations for production, the environment, and society. That would be three cases that could be used to multiply through different systems.”

“Success will be when consumers all over the world select for sustainability.”

“Success would be if we created a profound level of trust and openness. Then we can talk about our differences and disagreements and build a relationship on common values. I have no question that we share common values.”

“To be successful we need to find the language to explain sustainability. What are the values we want present in food supply system? The measure of success will be by others.”

“My hope is that we can focus our efforts in an area narrow enough to get things

done and broad enough to also have ultimate impact on everything that needs to be worked on.”

In the closing remarks for the first gathering of the Lab Team, many people expressed surprise about three aspects of the experience that speak to the possibilities for future success:

- The interpersonal relationships that formed,
- The ability of the group to work well together in spite of the great diversity present
- The amount of individual learning Lab Team members experienced

Team Member closing remarks:

“My biggest surprise was seeing that so many people from so many different sectors of society and so many different parts of the world have passion here.”

“My surprise is that – given that I’ve thought a lot about sustainable food systems, my thinking has gotten far beyond where I thought before when I didn’t expect to move that far.”

“My surprise was that in two and one-half days that I feel I’ve started to bond with people and that I not only understand the concepts now of sustainability, but I can see the challenges and I can feel the opportunities that are out there as well because of the relationships that we’re starting to build”.

“I did expect to come here and make acquaintance with all of you, but I’m leaving with the beginnings of some really deep friendships. Perhaps that’s a little bit of a surprise and I look for that to deepen and strengthen with our future gatherings, and that’s going to be just a wonderful bonus gift from this experience.”

Lab Team Members and Executive Champions for the Foundation Workshop

Executive Champions

Antony Burgmans, Chairman, **Unilever**, the Netherlands
*Pierre Calame, President, **Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation**, France
*Wout Dekker, CEO and Chairman, **Nutreco**, the Netherlands
*Walter Fontana Filho, President, **Sadia**, Brazil
*Richard Foster, Vice President, **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**, United States
Joost Martens, Regional Director, **Oxfam GB**, Mexico and Caribbean
Eugenio Peixoto, Secretary of Agrarian Reform, **Ministry of Agriculture**, Brazil
Gerrit Rauws, Director, **King Baudouin Foundation**, Belgium
Mark Ritchie, President, **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**, United States
*Richard Schnieders, CEO, **SYSCO**, United States
*Paul Tr an Van Thinh, Former Ambassador of the **European Union**
*Roland Vaxelaire, Director of Quality and Sustainable Development, **Carrefour**, France

Lab Team Members

Johan Alleman, **King Baudouin Foundation**, Belgium
Arie van den Brand, former **Member of Parliament**, the Netherlands
Pedro de Camargo Neto, **Sociedade Rural Brasileira**, Brazil
Jo o S. Campari, Director, **The Nature Conservancy**, Brazil
Juan Cheaz, Regional Policy Coordinator for Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, **Oxfam GB**, Mexico
Jason Clay, Vice President, Center for Conservation Innovation, **World Wildlife Fund**, United States
Osler Desouzart, Consultant, formerly with **Sadia, Perdig o and Doux Frangosul**, Brazil
Carolee Deuel, Vice-President, Research, Quality and Technology, **Kellogg Corporation**, United States
Ron Dudley, President, **Cargill**, Specialty Canola Oils, United States
Meire de Fatima Ferreira, **Sadia**, Brazil
Laura Freeman, President and CEO, **Laura's Lean Beef**, United States
Gilles Gaebel, **Carrefour**, France
Rosalinda Guillen, former farm worker and leader in the **farm worker movement**, United States
Oran Hesterman, Program Director, **W. K. Kellogg Foundation**, United States
Eugene Kahn, Vice-President for Sustainability, **General Mills**, United States
Panayotis Lebessis, Economic Analysis and Evaluation, DG Agriculture of the **European Commission**, Belgium
Karen Lehman, **The Minnesota Project/Adaptive Leadership**, United States
Hannes Lorenzen, Adviser, **European Parliament**, Belgium
*Theresa Marquez, Marketing Director, **Organic Valley Cooperative**, United States
Neyde N brega Nery, Executive Director, Assocene - **Associa o de Orienta o das Cooperativas do Nordeste**, Brazil
Frank van Ooijen, Public Affairs Director, **Nutreco**, the Netherlands
*Henk van Oosten, Innovation Network, **Dutch Ministry of Agriculture**, the Netherlands
Frederick Payton, **University of Georgia** and farmers' cooperative, United States
Bjarne Pedersen, **Consumers International**, United Kingdom
Larry Pulliam, Senior Vice President, **SYSCO**, United States
Elena Saraceno, Policy Advisor to the President, **European Commission**, Belgium
Peggy Sechrist, Texas farmer, President, **Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group**, United States

Maureen Silos, Executive Director, **Caribbean Institute**, Suriname
Bruce Tozer, Managing Director, Structured Trade and Commodity Finance, **Rabobank International**, Great Britain
Pia Valota, ACU - **Associazione Consumatori Utenti**, and Secretary-General, Association of European Consumers, Italy
Jan-Kees Vis, Sustainable Agriculture Manager, **Unilever**, the Netherlands
Bernd Voss, Vice President, **Arbeitsgemeinschaft bauerliche Landwirtschaft**, Germany
Pierre Vuarin, **Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation**, France
Marcelo Vieira, farmer and board member, **Brazil Specialty Coffee Association** and Sociedade Rural Brasileira, Brazil

Lab Secretariat

Hal Hamilton, Co-Leader, Sustainability Institute
Zaid Hassan, Process Documentation, Generon Consulting
*Joseph Jaworski, Faculty, Generon Consulting
Adam Kahane, Co-Leader, Generon Consulting
Alison Sander, Research
Don Seville, Research, Sustainability Institute
Susan Sweitzer, Learning History, Sustainability Institute
Susan Taylor, Logistics, Generon Consulting
Alain Wouters, Facilitation, Generon Consulting

* Unable to attend the Workshop in Bergen.

APPENDIX A

CHALLENGES

Motivating through the business case

- Fear: Don't want to finance "unsustainable foods,"
 - Greed
 - How can we recognize sustainable food systems and finance them?
- System innovation –
 - Full cost accounting by farmers, move from price takers to price setters
- Making sustainable activities financially viable, make the business case for sustainability

Remove trade distortions

- World ag. dumping
- Reform of policies—initiatives re : Overproduction policy –
 - Overproduction creates unsustainability down the supply chain
 - Creates qualities unwanted by the market
- "Do what I say, not what I do:" Free trade agenda
- Trade barriers & subsidies

Mainstreaming

- Niche → mainstream

Prevent Deterioration of Natural Resources

- Loss of soil carbon and organic matter
- Cumulative impact of farming practices

Make world work in a different way (values, ethics)

- What is included in sustainability

Develop relationships outside commodity markets

- Volatility of commodity prices

Stimulate demand

- To sensitize and create partnerships with major companies to demand food (soy?) that is produced sustainably
- Consumer perceptions of sustainability, and agriculture policies which favor volume over quality and sustainability
- Educate consumers - prices are the key
 - Develop markets for sustainable food products
 - Get industry out of price fixation
- Balancing consumer desire to fund/support sustainable food supply chains
- Dialogue: retail and consumers decide the way food has to be produced in the name of consumers

Increase market access

- To give the small farmers access to education, information, market
- The whole system, more market power for the producers, government action?
- Access to distribution by small-scale farmers
- Making SD matter and ensuring access
- “Pasting” mainstream processing and distribution over more sustainable production

Make relevant information available

- Traceability
- Direct reliable information
- Transparency on supply step for food safety
- Improve relationships
- Get information feedback and coordination

Improve access to good food

- Global food distribution (hunger)

Broader participation

- Institutional/cultural barriers between farm, distribution, academic, state
- Labor/workers not included in the development of production and processing systems
- Culture/trust

Develop shared understanding of what’s sustainable

- No shared meaning of what’s sustainable

Better coordination across the supply chain

- Coordinated efficiency through the whole chain rather than isolated efficiency
- Information and organization to link production and consumption

Enable sustainable farming practices

- Address issues of efficiency, economic yield, natural resource management, quality in production of fresh produce
- Resources – quality, quantity, income

Create policies enabling sustainable food supply chains

- Inappropriate and segmented policymaking of influential countries, lack of appropriate forum for debating policy reform
- An international trade and ag policy allowing sustainable food supply chains
- Change policy framework for rural development and trade
- To make trade fair, to allow small farmers to earn a living under fair trade policies
- Trade and ag policies – avoid the competition between very different agriculture food systems, preserve prices for farmers above cost of production
- How can the EU/EP improve food/ag legislation as to bring a more fair share of added value back to the rural regions, small farmers, poor consumers?

Set standards for new markets:

- Standard setting for crop production for bio-energy and bio-industrial uses

Information as input to whole system

- Open information about the whole chain, on aspects that are asked for by people

APPENDIX B

DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Food Sustainability Indicators-"Triple Bottom line:" Social Responsibility, Environmental Stewardship, and Financial Returns

At the Foundation Workshop, the Lab Team members worked in four different groups to consider possible indicators of sustainability within the food chain. Here we have grouped the indicators from all the groups into the triple bottom line scheme. While all the ideas are not in the language of indicators, they show the range of concerns and goals for which indicators could be developed.

Thoughts about indicators in general:

- They link to underlying values (ethical dimension)
- Balance a set of indicators, even with some contradictions
- Good to have higher-level framework, but local embodiment will need to be flexible
- High quality indicators will be:
 - Few
 - Cost effective
 - Measurable
 - Related to marketing
 - Proxies for several issues

Potential Sustainability Indicators

Environment-Ecological

- Soil carbon/organic matter
- Water consumed to produce food
- Amount of non-renewable energy required to get food to the plate (e.g. energy suppliers)
- Health of the eco-system
- Use renewable resources to preserve potential for future generations (add to natural capital)
- Minimizes use of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides
- Preference for local over global production

Social Equity

- Distribution of food for all actors (suggests value of who gets what; about values, compassion)

- Enough food to feed the world. Adequate food/nutrition for all. Food distribution reaches all people. Feed more people (availability/access)
- Distribution of \$/Euros for all actors (fair division of value added across the value chain). Improve livelihoods of farmers and workers
- Participation/transparency/contracts (indication of origin)
- Fair wages and non-exploitive conditions for workers (e.g. worker input into decision-making—farm workers and local businesses and farmers), labor standards
- Transparency: reliable food safety information available
- Safety and health of food produced
- Quality of relationship between us and our food
- Quality of relationship between us and the earth

Economic

- Financial viability/stability for all actors (holistic view of return on investment)
- Efficiency (inputs, waste)
- Decentralization so revenue circulates back to local community and stabilizes local economy
- Economic efficiency
- Affordable to consumers and profitable to investors in the system
- Socially inclusive—works for small-scale and not only large-scale producers
- Provide price signals that reward producers

APPENDIX C

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Group 1:

- Food certification: what can we learn? Fisheries, comparisons of labels
- Increasing food productions: land grant colleges, aquaculture, private seed
- Product specification initiatives from buyers, internal legally binding initiatives
- Financing, tax incentives, investment options,
- Market chain restructuring: Brazil, processing plants, investors etc., sugarcane plantation in Brazil,
- Social enterprises, pioneer industries,
- Earth University in Costa Rica,
- Commodity-specific roundtables on specific commodities
- SAI, Erogap, retail based on above
- Food distribution efforts

Group 2:

- Relationship coffee, origin known, branding, RainForest certification
- Marine Stewardship Council fisheries, small, big ones in assessment.
- Traditional regional dairy and meat production in Germany—preserving landscape
- Branding in Brazil, traditional regional branding, cultural component important, honey and cashew nuts, context where experience is happening

Group 3:

- Twin Trading, cooperative working with Oxfam, fair traded
- Chef's Collaborative, local producers
- Zimbabwe
- Denmark direct selling
- India educational system training, integrate policies with multi-stakeholder actions, nutrition
- West Africa, potatoes
- US food coops
- Small-scale producers,
- Peru, culinary school to cook locally grown products
- Norwegian citizen panels, discuss sustainable local food
- Denmark, convert public institutions to serve organic food products
- Fisheries in Canada and France, rest periods during fish-breeding season
- Poland, water source opened between coalitions of church, etc.

Group 5

- Vertically integrated system of production creates interdependence between corporations and small farmers (Brazil pigs and tobacco)
- Ethiopia—application of high technology to cultivate in salt-affected soils, reestablishment of human settlement, high technology in first world in very depleted areas of the world
- Carrefour management of resource (fishing resource). Stimulating independent fishing methods, quota of what they can capture, to make commercialization inform the consumer about preservation of communities and so forth with the higher price.

Group 6:

- SYSCO, small farmers access to market information flow
- Laura's Lean Beef pays more money for grass-fed, a small feedlot-based
- Diamond Ranch

Group 7:

- Risk sharing to raise money for protecting riparian, guarantee no loss to farmer who will adopt their standards.
- Hoof and mouth that stopped export, farmer-funded program, eliminate hoof and mouth
- Farm to school program, pairing with local
- Native American food programs to raise traditional foods to improve their diets

APPENDIX D

WHAT WOULD SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Categories of answers to question:

- 1. Create innovations together*
- 2. Support one another as we innovate in our own situations*
- 3. Specifically innovate in food chains for social equity*
- 4. Create observable change in food systems, particularly consumer behavior*
- 5. Remind one another what is important about different aspects of sustainability*
- 6. Sustain strong relationships with one another*
- 7. Success must be acceptable, useful, and influential in our organizations*

Summary:

- If we listen carefully to one another and support one another as we innovate in food systems,
 - we will create change that influences consumer behavior, conserves the planet, and increases access by the poor, and
 - we will support and influence our own organizations to be stronger actors for sustainability.

1. Create innovations together

“We have to have numbers about how it can mainstream a business case. Identify two or three major commodities to mainstream, including considerations for production, the environment, and society. That would be three cases that could be used to multiply through different systems.”

“If we can have a few products launched or become mainstream to which we can apply the indicators of sustainability, that will be good. If we create it and it isn’t mainstream, that will be failure.”

“If we have a real experience that motivates us to help each other and show that it is possible to create.”

2. Support one another as we innovate in our own situations

“Work for sustainable food concept has two lines of thinking of what is sustainable. If people pursuing each of the two approaches actually ‘do,’ we would have had success.”

“Success means we have innovation or we would do together new things. I would pledge we must at least have success in supporting me in my innovation. We create safety and respect that I can share my doubts about my innovation and colleagues will help me with mine and I will learn by accepting the nasty questions as well. There will be success if we can help each other by our innovations, market innovation, and so forth. Not only focusing on doing new things.”

“Let’s try to see our own agenda moving this along and begin to be able to say we took one or two things in our own back yard and made it go somewhere.”

3. Specifically innovate in food chains for social equity

“We have worked in first world, we know how to do that, and I am hearing we aren’t doing enough. Success will be any product that is very broad socially and economically and reaches the poor, and not that we sell more fancy tomatoes to some rich person on Fifth Avenue.”

“Food chains with access for poor. Failure if it stays only with the rich consumers.”

“Mainstream is about empowering people as much as it is about product lines. If X people in Y places are empowered by the action to take initiatives in the areas where they are, whether a city [or] country, then we have success.”

“Success will be when the workers involved in food supply will be part of the development of the project. The workforce won’t be special interest, or a line in expense column. Will be an investment in making the project successful and a model for future food supply chains.”

“We need to take action that will help people who are hungry and who have malnutrition. It is the first problem for us in the world.”

“We are taking this food supply chain as the object in which we know better than anyone else and we are leaving out a bunch of people who are feeling left out. Where are the people who suffer along that chain? That isn’t me or you. Several have said we bring poverty into this agenda and distribute that value added in that chain. Some people don’t even consume anything; bring in some of these people.”

“I am interested in whether there are supplies of food for those that don’t have food and for a growing population.”

4. Create observable change in food systems

“If consumers understand, I believe they will choose the sustainable product. Success will be when consumers all over the world select for sustainability. Measure will be their acquisition of the products.”

“A lot of ideas are stopped with about 1-2% of products. At the end there will be something that will change in our organization and in the farms and unions, too.”

“In as much as we create a solution—product, process, knowledge—it be applicable and valuable to all segments of society. The right end will be broadly applicable to all economic groups.”

5. Remind one another what is important about different aspects of sustainability

“If in two years when I am thinking about doing something and new voices come to my mind as people who embody the pillars, [named a corporate executive, an environmental NGO leader and a representative of producer communities.] I have a clear understanding about what I might have learned to bring into the action that I choose.”

“Create empathy in our organizations for the other sectors: that would be a huge gain. This is an elite of the decision makers. If we can’t decide on our own, we can influence our organizations. We must take the hat of our organization and throw it away. My duty is to help farmers do their business while conserving the environment. There are some failures we need to talk about as well. So the failure would be if we don’t take our institutional hats off and try to understand what the other person has to say. We won’t move very far.”

“Real failure would be if at the end of two years if we had not been engaged with folks from private industry. My sense is that there is fragility about that, and I know personally I would consider it a failure if at the end of the day it were the same NGO folks imagining work together.”

6. Sustain strong relationships with one another

“In front of a real situation we have confidence enough of each other in order to conflict strongly and as freely as possible and know that wouldn’t destroy the relationship.”

“Success would be if we created a profound level of trust and openness because that would represent we can arrive at a place where we can talk about our differences and disagreements and build a relationship on common values. I have no question that we share common values.”

“If all else goes wrong, success will be if by the end at least my organization and I are working with at least a dozen of you, sharing, doing things even if outside the Food Lab.”

“The presencing thing: if you are able to get me to “presence” it will be a success. If more of us are able to be in “presence” we will see something new. I don’t know what it is but I will try.”

7. Success must be acceptable, useful, and influential in our organizations

“We will not be the ones to judge if this is a success. We need to make sure that our successes are explainable and communicable to others. If we are not seen as a risk to the organizations already involved in sustainability actions. For the sake of relationship management we need to take that into account.”

“If I learn enough here that the work we do in my organization in the next 10 years is more impactful than we have done so far in my life. Failure if that doesn’t happen.”

“If we can explain to others what we want. You ask the person if they know about sustainable agriculture and they have no clue. This is true of 98% of my colleagues. To be successful we need to find the language to explain certain things. What are the values we want present in food supply system? The measure of success will be by others. But for me success will be that this group should earn the world food prize in 2006.”

APPENDIX E

LEARNING AGENDA QUESTIONS

Trends and Analysis

- Understand how regional chains work – why retail concentration?
- Future retail concentration (power of the chain)
- Prospective analysis of agriculture and food system trends, proactive strategies
- Global food macro production trend information
- World trade sugar, sugar workers conditions

Understanding and influencing consumer trends

- Consumer surveys on this topic
- How to educate the consumer
- Learning about how to motivate consumers to support sustainable producers through
 - Consumer insights
 - Psychology of consumption
 - Anthropology of sociology of consumption

Food, Health, Safety, and Policies

- Food safety, health, and access to food
- Mitigate, plan alternatives before damage done
- Nutrition policy successes in the world

Understanding the business case

- Learnings related to how to make the business case for sustainability: opportunities and obstacles
- How do large companies determine prices and conditions of agriculture?
- More knowledge and about fair profit rate schemes [for all companies in a chain] that are largely agreed upon
- Obstacles to get sustainable products on the market
- Is “taking local food to scale” an oxymoron? How has success and failure been defined by those who have attempted it?

Best practices and initiatives

- All other existing sustainable food programs and standards
- A comprehensive listing of existing quality certification systems
- What is out there? Best practices? Successful worker-owner organization?

Dynamics of innovation and sharing knowledge

- Learn all innovation, replication, and how to diffuse
- Learn efficient experiences from each other and share expertise and knowledge
- Training and development around rural development enterprises

Stakeholder experiences and dynamics r.e. sustainability

- Reformulate sustainability for consumers and politicians, operationally (the definition)
- Public/private partnership and informed networks
- New markets
- Communication and trust
- Learning activities that will teach us how to engage citizens in caring and learning about sustainability with emphasis on people living at the margins
- Model and experiences learning about tri-sector successful cases of sustainability

Understanding complex systemic problems of approaches

- How to optimize the model
- Study integrated approaches that will reduce the cumulative effects of food production systems
- Complex systems (other than food) that are achieving systems healing
- How to generate collective learning about systemic problems?
- Learn about plus/minus

APPENDIX F

FOOD LAB RESEARCH AGENDA

The facilitators took the suggestions for **research needed and resources offered** from the Learning Agenda Questions session and organised them as follows. Note: although specific Lab members offered these resources, attribution has not been retained in this public document. Please contact the learning historian for particular resources as needed.

Trends and analysis

- Trends and projections for retail growth
- Prospective analysis of agriculture and food system trends
- Global food macro production trend information
- Workers' conditions
 - IFPRI/New Paradigm network "Quovadis project" www.paradigm.co.cr
 - Consumer Research Institute Switzerland + Eubarometer Consumer Research
 - WBCSD, FAOSTAT, USGS on agricultural production
 - Marop Fugihard (PricewaterhouseCoopers sustainability director)
 - Embrapa, Brazil

Understanding and influencing consumer trends

- Consumer surveys
- Learning about how to educate and motivate consumers to support sustainability by accessing insights from psychology, anthropology, and sociology
 - Roper Environmental Consumer Report
 - Technomics Inc provides much data
 - The new EAA study on household consumption trends and food and the Eurobarometer surveys

Practices and policies for food quality

- Food safety
- Access to food
- Nutrition
- Research on relationships between health and nutrition, including organic food
 - Look into Amartya Sen's early research
 - AFFSA, France
 - Conservation International research on the issue of, for example, street-vended food
 - The new WHO strategy on diet and nutrition
 - Proceedings from OECD conference on "economics in the food system"
 - Michigan State University project on food standards
 - ILSI network white papers

Understanding the business case for sustainability

- Learning how to make the business case for sustainability: opportunities and obstacles:
 - WBCSD

- Global Reporting Initiative
- IMD CSM program

Dynamics of innovation and sharing knowledge

- Innovation diffusion theory and examples
- Learn efficient experiences from each other and share expertise and knowledge
- Training and development around rural development enterprises
 - Fritjof Capra
 - Embrapa
 - New paradigm network for institutional innovation

Stakeholder experiences and dynamics r.e. sustainability

- Reformulate sustainability for consumers and politicians, operationally (the definition)
- Public/private partnership and informed networks
- Learning activities that will teach us how to engage citizens in caring and learning about sustainability with emphasis on people living at the margins
- Models and experiences of tri-sector initiatives for sustainability:
 - Switzerland ag policy
 - Fish farming in Pernambuco
 - Usina Catende
 - “Dom Helder Camara” Human development project in semi-arid
 - European Agriculture [indecipherable]
 - Roquefort cheese industries
 - Leader Initiatives: 12 years bottom-up local development, based on partnerships, database of experiences
 - Ogallala Commons Project – Dr Darryl Birkenfeld

Understanding what influences agribusiness decision-making

- How do large companies determine prices?
- What are the major drivers behind conditions of agriculture?
- Is it possible to negotiate and agree upon fair profit rate schemes for all parts of the chain?
- What are the obstacles to get sustainable products on the market?
- Is “taking local food to scale” an oxymoron? How has success and failure been defined by those who have attempted it?

Understanding complex systemic problems

- Study integrated approaches
- Complex systems (other than food) that are achieving systems healing
- How to generate collective learning about systemic problems?
 - Allan Savory Center for Holistic Management
 - Listen forces – EU
 - Round table for sustainable development – EU
 - WWF work on Ag pesticides and runoff on Meso America: bananas, pineapple, sugar, OJ, palm oil, etc.

Best practices and initiatives

- Study all other existing sustainable food programs and standards (Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council, Cocoa, Shrimp)
- A comprehensive listing of existing quality certification systems
- Successful worker-owner organizations, including new generation of farmer cooperatives
- Global Reporting Initiative
- Protected Harvest
- Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) www.cbnrmasia.org (Jason)
- Generating Income and Conserving Income 1996
- WI potato project WPUGA/WWF/UWI
- Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform database
- Europegap standards
- FLO fair trade
 - No till association Brazil
 - WWF degraded land study
- Andre de Jager, Agriculture Economics Research Institute
- Wageningen Research University, Holland
- SYSCO/Cargill Midwest Pork Products Project
- IFPRI
- CGIAR
- Data collected by SARE program
- Development of organic agriculture in Romania
- Ground Fish Forum
- Oxfam sustainable livelihoods program
- Neuland Cooperative
- Lodi-Woodbridge wine grape BMO work and practice

Books and people

- Invite Fritjof Capra to talk about *The Web of Life* – Jan-Kees Vis
- World Agriculture and the Environment 2004, by Jason Clay
- Dennis Avery, “Saving the Planet with Pesticides and Plastics”
- Dennis Avery, “Saving Nature’s Legacy through Better Farming”
- Dennis Avery, “Meeting the Challenge of Sustainability”
- Norman Borlaug, “Fertilizers and the Green Revolution”
- Norman Borlaug, “Feeding a World of 10 Billion People”
- Norman Borlaug, “A Fertilizer-based Green Revolution for Africa”
- Bjorn Lomborg, “The Skeptical Environmentalist”
- Books by Mary Douglas on anthropology of consumption
- Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*
- Sarah Lynch & Chuck Benbrook



Sustainable Food Lab Meetings

- **Foundation Workshop:** June 1-3, 2004. The Team begins to construct a shared map of the current reality of the system, based on varied perspectives and experiences and identifies areas for further research and learning. Location: Bergen, the Netherlands.
- **Learning Journeys.** Trips organized around learning agendas developed in the first workshop, designed to help the participants learn about the system by observing it (and other relevant systems) first hand. Location: Brazil.
- **Innovation Retreat:** November 14-20, 2004. The Team will synthesize observations from learning journeys, construct a set of food system innovations, crystallize visions of the future that they want and believe need to come forth, and identify strategic leverage points for shifting the systems towards this vision. Location: near Phoenix, Arizona, USA.
- **Design Studio:** April 4-7, 2005. The kick-off for the 5 to 10 prototype initiatives. Each of these initiatives will be aimed at mainstreaming sustainable food supply chains. Location: Salzburg, Austria.
- **Mid-Course Review:** November 8-9, 2005. This session is to review, support, and develop the projects identified in Salzburg. Location: EARTH University in Costa Rica.
- **Venture Launch:** May 31-June 1, 2006 (Executive Champions June 1 only). The Lab Team, the Executive Champions, and other interested parties will review the results from the now-completed prototype initiatives, and decide which ones will be continued and taken to scale. The group will determine how this will be accomplished, with what resources and by which institutions. Location: New York City, USA.