



Food Systems Research and Education in Vermont and Beyond
Jane Kolodinsky

Issue: Moving a land grant university toward a more dynamic and comprehensive approach to the food system.

What has been Done: Two components were used. Colleagues across the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at UVM came together and agreed to participate in the development of a Food Systems Master's program. I served as the P.I., along with Amy Trubek from Nutritional and Food Science on a \$150,000 USDA Higher Education Challenge Grant that was written as part of my project and awarded September 2009. We will spend the next year planning the curriculum with input from colleagues around the country who are also interested. Teams from NYU and Tufts will visit; and our team will write the University proposal 2009-2010. We expect approval at the University level in a year. The majority of funding has been allocated for graduate assistantships; half of each one to be provided by participating departments. While we wrote and won this grant last year, our University has recently announced a new initiative to develop several new, integrated Ph.D. programs. Food Systems is on the list of possibilities. We hope that the M.S. and Ph.D. can dovetail.

The second aspect of my project was to spear-head a new Food Systems Research Collaborative housed in the Center for Rural Studies, which I direct. As a strategic move, we have commissioned five initial white papers on "Opportunities for Vermont Agriculture," each of which will also be submitted to a refereed journal. The topic areas for the first series are food safety, organic dairy, farm to school programs, regional "taste of place," and building local food entrepreneurship efforts. Faculty who could "hit the ground running" were paired with a community partner to author each paper. In addition, we held a community brain-storming session to highlight research needs in the food system in Vermont and region. This exercise built trust among the MANY food related organizations in Vermont and strengthened the idea that the University could provide research expertise that could advance the goals of these organizations; we are not trying to compete with the provision of services. By placing the collaborative in an already established University Center, we are able to begin our work instead of spending valuable time navigating the bureaucracy of the University to "create" a new place to do this work. The CRS was already conducting research on many aspects of the food system and we built on that momentum.

Impacts: It is expected that more visibility for food related education and research will result. A full report will be available at the end of the study.

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Contact Information: Jane Kolodinsky, Ph.D. University of Vermont, jkolodin@uvm.edu