University of Vermont Food Systems

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR 2016 - 2020
University of Vermont—
A Food Systems Pioneer and Leader

Over the past several decades, the University of Vermont (UVM) has established its leadership in food systems research, teaching, and outreach. UVM faculty, staff, and students have developed and maintained this position by embracing transdisciplinary approaches and fostering strong partnerships within the university, state, and beyond that contribute to a culture of collaboration and innovation. Given its strong systems orientation, UVM food systems scholarship encompasses a wide range of topics such as innovative production systems, environmental quality, entrepreneurship, human health and wellbeing, and nutrition. UVM is an academic pioneer in food systems, as the first university in the country to offer undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral degrees in Food Systems. UVM’s scale, as a land-grant university in a small state, provides students, staff, and faculty access to both diverse resources and an approachable campus community. This setting sustains relationships that integrate distinct disciplines in the natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities.

Our Vision

The University of Vermont envisions a world in which individuals and communities understand and deeply appreciate the interconnectedness among food production, sourcing, processing, transport, energy, access, and the impact on personal and environmental health. Individuals, families, and communities make decisions that consider social, political, and ecological factors and promote environmental and community wellbeing. The global food system provides nutritious and culturally appropriate food, regardless of individual life circumstances.

Our Mission

The University of Vermont develops solutions to global food systems challenges through world-class transdisciplinary research, teaching, and outreach dedicated to improving economic, ecological, and human wellbeing.
WHAT IS A FOOD SYSTEM?

A food system is an interconnected web of activities, resources, and people that extends across all domains involved in providing human nourishment and sustaining health, including production, processing, packaging, distribution, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food. The organization of food systems reflects and responds to social, cultural, political, economic, health, and environmental conditions, and can be identified at multiple scales, from a household kitchen to a city, state, national, or global level.

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A Food Systems Innovator with Global Relevance, Grounded in Vermont

The University of Vermont (UVM) is widely recognized for its leadership on local and regional food systems. Grounded in research, teaching, and outreach, food systems innovation at UVM is strengthened by its unique home in Vermont, which boasts a thriving local, entrepreneurial food system.

Vermont agriculture has flourished despite challenging conditions, including poor agricultural soils, a compressed growing season, and limited food processing and distribution infrastructure. Creative financing and land trusts have cultivated a new generation of farmers, despite rising land prices and an aging workforce. In response to nutrient runoff from farms, farmers are utilizing production practices that protect soil and water quality. Food entrepreneurs have generated world-renowned specialty products. Vermont is a national leader in Farm to School programs, and the state has the highest number of farmers’ markets per capita. The Vermont Farm to Plate Network is implementing a 10-year plan to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sectors, and improve access to healthy, local food. As a partner with diverse stakeholders, UVM has played a critical collaborative role in this revitalization of Vermont’s farm and food economy.

In addition to tackling Vermont’s food system, UVM research and curricula address national and international challenges and emergent opportunities. Faculty have studied how migration patterns relate to culinary traditions, food insecurity among farmers who participate in international commodity markets, and the climate impacts of land use change due to agricultural conversion. A study abroad program in Oaxaca offers a food systems track in which students learn about traditional agriculture, cuisine, and nutrition.

The focus of food systems at UVM in the next five years is to significantly increase the capacity to address the most pressing problems facing the global food system. Many of the solutions developed at UVM and through collaborative partnerships can be shared with neighboring communities, states, and developing countries that experience similar conditions. With new curricula, UVM faculty are framing complex concepts that prepare students for careers in a new era of environmental and political dilemmas. UVM’s successes in research, education, and partnerships has positioned it to become a global leader by 2020.
OVERVIEW | STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS: 2016 - 2020

By 2020, UVM will establish itself as a **global leader in food systems education, research and collaboration**, building on decades of food systems leadership by pursuing the following five goals.

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<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>WORKING OBJECTIVES</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TRANS DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH</strong></td>
<td>Strengthen UVM’s transdisciplinary approach to food systems and establish the university as a global leader in transdisciplinary food systems research.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INTRA-UNIVERSITY CONNECTIVITY</strong></td>
<td>Promote and support collaboration on teaching, research and outreach.</td>
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<td><strong>EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS</strong></td>
<td>Sustain existing and cultivate new partnerships with food systems leaders at local, state, regional, national, and international levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENTS</strong></td>
<td>Prepare UVM’s undergraduate and graduate students for careers in food systems in academia, the private sector, government, and civil society.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td>Foster and sustain a broad range of food systems activities and programs at UVM for all students, faculty, staff and individuals in our community, state and beyond to enhance their understanding of and experience with food systems.</td>
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### GOALS

- Engage faculty, staff, and students.
- Identify institutional leverage points.
- Establish and refine a clear assessment methodology.
- Capture and communicate lessons learned.
- Establish three transdisciplinary food systems projects.
- Develop a council to share work with campus leaders.
- Educate students through transdisciplinary approaches.

### WORKING OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen the UVM food systems web presence.
- Offer workshops on transdisciplinary research, methodological pluralism, and systems thinking.
- Develop a cross-campus structure that supports food systems efforts.
- Pursue new collaborations with campus partners.
- Recruit a food systems director.
- Build awareness of existing partnerships.
- Develop a well-defined mechanism to coordinate and respond to collaboration requests.
- Develop three new collaborative projects.
- Establish a protocol to ensure mutual benefit.
- Identify skill sets desired by potential employers.
- Develop resources to support program growth.
- Ensure food systems students gain an understanding of transdisciplinary concepts.
- Create additional alignment between priority research areas and the graduate program.
- Support food systems instruction facilities.
- Create experiential learning opportunities that contribute to high impact learning and understanding about food systems issues.
- Expand the number of educational, research, and outreach activities in local communities.
- Develop and implement approaches that support healthy habits.
- Strengthen food systems leadership through the nationally recognized Food Systems Summit and other events.
- Monitor progress and develop additional benchmarks in university dining.
GOAL 1 > Transdisciplinary Research

STRENGTHEN UVM’S TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO FOOD SYSTEMS AND ESTABLISH THE UNIVERSITY AS A GLOBAL LEADER IN TRANSDISCIPLINARY FOOD SYSTEMS RESEARCH.

Transdisciplinarity is a relatively recent concept in academia, emerging from a recognition of the limits of traditional academic disciplines and an outgrowth of earlier attempts at integration such as “interdisciplinarity” and “multidisciplinarity.” Transdisciplinary approaches are evolving and there are many different perspectives on what it means. In general, it is characterized by the intentional integration of academic disciplines, including the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, thereby generating new knowledge that could not be created without the integration of a diversity of disciplines.

UVM faculty members are embracing transdisciplinary research as a critical mechanism for analyzing and addressing complex food systems issues. Initial experiences with this approach have highlighted both the incredible value that transdisciplinary research can offer, as well as the difficulty of utilizing a transdisciplinary approach. Transdisciplinary scholarship is made challenging due to, among other issues, the different languages and methodological approaches favored by intellectual disciplines.

Although this is a new and difficult road, UVM embraces the idea that there is value in better integrating the knowledge and understanding that social and natural sciences bring to problem solving in this complex world.

With this unique emphasis on transdisciplinary approaches to food systems, UVM faculty, staff, and students have an opportunity to play a key role in the intellectual advancement of the practice of transdisciplinarity (which is not exclusive to food systems), as well as the application of transdisciplinarity to the field of food systems.

WORKING OBJECTIVES

1. Engage faculty, staff, and students on the key challenges and opportunities of transdisciplinary approaches.
2. Identify institutional leverage points critical for effective transdisciplinary research and secure funding to provide incentives that reduce or eliminate barriers.
3. Establish and refine a clear methodology for assessing the success of transdisciplinary food systems research projects.
4. Capture and communicate lessons learned from transdisciplinary successes and failures, including best practices, key areas for inquiry, and experiences in the application of transdisciplinary methods to the field of food systems, to internal and external audiences.
5. Establish at least three transdisciplinary research projects focused on challenges facing the food system.
6. Develop a council to share work with campus leaders, including department chairs and deans, to identify the value and unique opportunities that transdisciplinary research offers, and advocate for greater recognition of pre-tenure faculty who practice transdisciplinary research.
7. Educate students through transdisciplinary approaches to food systems analysis and research.
GOAL 2 > Intra-University Connectivity, Collaboration, and Participation

PROMOTE AND SUPPORT COLLABORATION ON TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND OUTREACH.

Complex food systems issues demand an unprecedented level of connectivity and collaboration among faculty in various programs, departments, and units. The success of future efforts rests on the rich connections among the UVM food systems community. It will be important to continue to support the social connections among faculty, staff, and students, which lay the groundwork for research and teaching collaborations.

Building on the foundation of current collaborations, there is an opportunity to extend the reach of food systems to partner with additional units on campus. Nascent relationships with the College of Medicine, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, and the Grossman School of Business should be nurtured and enhanced.

A vital component of building a culture of collaboration is developing an organizational structure and leadership team who can bring the university together around the myriad issues in contemporary food systems, and also generate funding streams to inject resources into strategic intra-university ventures.

Finally, all these efforts must be effectively communicated to campus stakeholders to ensure that the community is well-informed of current projects and opportunities.

WORKING OBJECTIVES

1. Strengthen the UVM food systems web presence for internal and external visitors, including food systems faculty, food systems academic programs, career paths for students, food-related classes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and food-related events hosted at UVM.

2. Offer workshops dedicated to supporting and promoting transdisciplinary research and scholarship, methodological pluralism, and systems thinking.

3. Develop a cross-campus structure that supports food systems research, academic programs, and interactions among faculty, students, and staff.

4. Pursue new collaborations with campus partners, including the College of Medicine, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, and the Grossman School of Business.

5. Recruit a food systems director who can successfully bridge disciplines, raise funds, and effectively communicate achievements to internal and external partners.
GOAL 3 > External Partnerships

SUSTAIN EXISTING AND CULTIVATE NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERS EXTERNAL TO UVM AT THE LOCAL, STATE, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS.

The University of Vermont strives to be an innovative partner and valuable resource for local, state, regional, national, and international communities through our teaching, research, and extension efforts. As the state’s land grant university, UVM has a history of applied research and outreach in support of healthy communities. Ongoing success in the field of food systems depends upon productive and mutually beneficial relationships with outside partners, including other educational institutions, government agencies, and organizations in the nonprofit and private sectors.

Whether in the context of service learning classes or internships, students represent UVM through their interactions with partners. UVM has a responsibility to adequately prepare those students for successful and effective collaborations. Likewise, faculty and staff engage with many partners who are approached by multiple arms of the university. There is an opportunity to streamline and leverage our relationships for the benefit of both sides of such partnerships.

UVM faculty, staff, and students benefit immensely from connections with external partners, as they provide opportunities for studying and addressing real world challenges. As we continue our efforts to remain at the forefront of food systems education, research, and outreach, collaborating with outside partners will become even more critical.

WORKING OBJECTIVES

1. Build awareness of existing partnerships in the field of food systems between the University of Vermont and outside entities.
2. Develop a well-defined mechanism to coordinate and respond to requests from outside partners interested in collaborating on UVM food systems work.
3. Develop three new collaborative projects that connect research needs from outside partners with student training in community-based and on-farm research.
4. Establish a protocol for external partnerships to ensure that both partners mutually benefit from teaching, research, or outreach collaborations.
GOAL 4 > Students

PREPARE UVM’S UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS FOR INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP CAREERS IN FOOD SYSTEMS, IN ACADEMIA, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, GOVERNMENT, AND CIVIL SOCIETY.

University of Vermont food systems programs are unique in depth and breadth. Courses are taught by numerous faculty and staff who are actively involved in food systems research and the development of food systems curricula. Through diverse internship, service-learning, research, and community partnerships, students acquire knowledge and develop skills to understand complex dynamics of the food system at multiple scales, including state, national, and international levels.

The undergraduate program provides a sequential curriculum for students interested in approaching food systems from a variety of perspectives. The undergraduate experience culminates in the design and implementation of projects and theses.

The graduate program, which awards both master’s and doctoral degrees, cultivates adaptable problem solvers and systems thinkers. The program prepares students to address some of the most challenging problems within food systems, from building climate change resilience, to reducing food waste, to exploring equitable distribution and fair labor practices. The curriculum is designed to both inspire and motivate students through a diversity of research methods, transdisciplinary approaches, systems thinking, and community engagement. Food systems graduate students are trained to learn through open-ended inquiry and to translate learning into action.

Students coming to UVM for non-degree experiences have access to UVM expertise and facilities. Non-degree students increase UVM’s impact on the food system through short courses, professional development, and training for beginning farmers.

UVM’s wide ranging and comprehensive offerings provide prospective students with multiple points of access to the program that best fits their interests.

WORKING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify skill sets desired by potential employers across food systems industries and integrate them into curricula.
2. Develop resources to support the expected growth of the food systems undergraduate and graduate programs, including student fellowships, faculty teaching, mentors for research, and designated advising, as well as marketing and promotion.
3. Ensure food systems students gain an understanding of transdisciplinary concepts, approaches, opportunities, and challenges.
4. Create additional alignment between priority research areas and the graduate program research concentrations.
5. Support food systems instructional facilities, such as cooking labs and the campus educational farm.
GOAL 5 > Community

FOSTER AND SUSTAIN A BROAD RANGE OF FOOD SYSTEMS ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS AT UVM FOR ALL STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND INDIVIDUALS IN OUR COMMUNITY, STATE, AND BEYOND TO ENHANCE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF AND EXPERIENCE WITH FOOD SYSTEMS.

In addition to a tradition of food systems research and education, UVM is well-regarded for leadership in translating food systems scholarship into practice. UVM integrates our food systems vision into a wide range of programs and activities that benefit and include students, faculty, staff, and community members.

The entire UVM community is exposed to food systems issues through campus dining, the implementation of the Real Food Challenge, annual events such as Food Day and Earth Week, the annual UVM Food Systems Summit, and UVM Extension programming across the state. UVM aims to promote new ideas, model responsible purchasing and healthy food choices, and serve as an institutional leader as other institutions of higher education increasingly incorporate food systems concepts and values into their campus culture.

WORKING OBJECTIVES

1. Create experiential learning opportunities that contribute to high impact learning and understanding about food systems issues.
2. Expand the number of educational, research, and outreach activities that address food systems in local communities.
3. Develop and implement approaches that support healthy eating behaviors, responsible purchasing, and food preparation habits for students.
4. Continue to grow the annual Food Systems Summit as a space to foster food systems analysis, education, and collaboration.
5. Expand partnership with UVM Dining in support of educational and food procurement initiatives.
6. Strengthen food systems leadership, education, and collaboration through the Food Systems Summit and other events on campus.
7. Monitor progress towards current goals and develop additional benchmarks to maintain a leadership position in university dining.
An Adaptive Strategy
This report was prepared after an extensive strategic directions process involving UVM faculty, staff, and students, as well as interviews with external stakeholders during the winter and spring of 2016. This process has established clear strategic directions for 2016 to 2020 and food systems leadership at UVM is committed to continuously monitoring progress, measuring impact, and adapting strategy. An adaptive monitoring system will be established and external indicators will be used to assess UVM’s progress towards establishing itself as a global food systems leader by 2020.

Implementation and Resource Mobilization Plan
A detailed Implementation and Resource Mobilization Plan is under development and will feature final Objectives, as well as specific strategies for accomplishing the Goals and Objectives. The plan will also address issues of leadership, governance, structure, and branding.

Acknowledgements
We are grateful to the UVM faculty, staff, students, and administrators who contributed their time and provided thoughtful input to the Strategic Directions report. We are also deeply appreciative of the time taken by more than a dozen individuals outside of UVM – partners and directors at other university-based food systems programs and initiatives – who spoke openly about their own programs and their perceptions and perspectives about food systems at UVM.