**Farm Viability Systems Map**

**Class activity for Chapter 3**

***Food, Farms and Community***

**Material Requirements: None**

**Time Requirement: 25-35 minutes**

Break students into small groups of three to five and invite them to explore the many factors that affect the viability of farms in the United States by drawing a systems map. As always, the process of systems mapping starts by identifying one or more key stock-flow systems around which the larger systems map can be constructed. For this systems map, the most useful stock is the farm’s wealth, while its most relevant inflow will be revenue and its most relevant outflows will be expenses of various sorts. Students may choose to separate revenues and expenses into different types, to facilitate developing a thorough list of elements that influence these flows.

As students list elements that affect a farm’s revenue stream and expenses, they should be mindful to include a range of factors such as costs of land, labor, capital equipment such as machinery, debt, and inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, etc. While the costs of these factors of production directly impact the outflow of expenses, other factors influence these costs and so would indirectly impact a farm’s expenses. What are some of these indirect factors? How much control do farmers have over the direct and indirect factors that affect their cost of production?

On the revenue side, what factors influence a farm’s inflows of cash? How might some of their expenditures, such as marketing or advertising, influence their revenues? How might their decisions on what sorts of inputs to buy, or whether to be certified organic, affect their revenue stream?

Once students have worked on their systems maps for 25-35 minutes, bring the class back together to discuss the exercise and its impact on their understanding of agricultural businesses. You can enquire about some of the different factors they chose to include in their systems map. There is no one right way to draw a systems map that relates to agricultural land, so all students’ expressions of this system can be ‘right’.