

What's Social about Social Sustainability of Local Food Systems?



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Key Points

- “Social sustainability” as a concept and empirical phenomenon requires more attention.
- Studies on the social impact of local food systems (LFS) tend to be skewed on certain types of relationships, excluding others.
- Community development/resiliency aspects of LFSs in both the rural and urban areas need to be further studied.



“Social” ≠ “Economic” Sustainability

➤ Assumption:

Economic Sustainability
(Profitability at the farm level)



Ecological Sustainability
(Soil health at the farm level)



Social Sustainability
(Quality of life at the community level)

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- What's good for economy is good for society?
 - Farmer profitability
 - \$ consumed
 - # jobs created
- Causality, association, interactional effect?

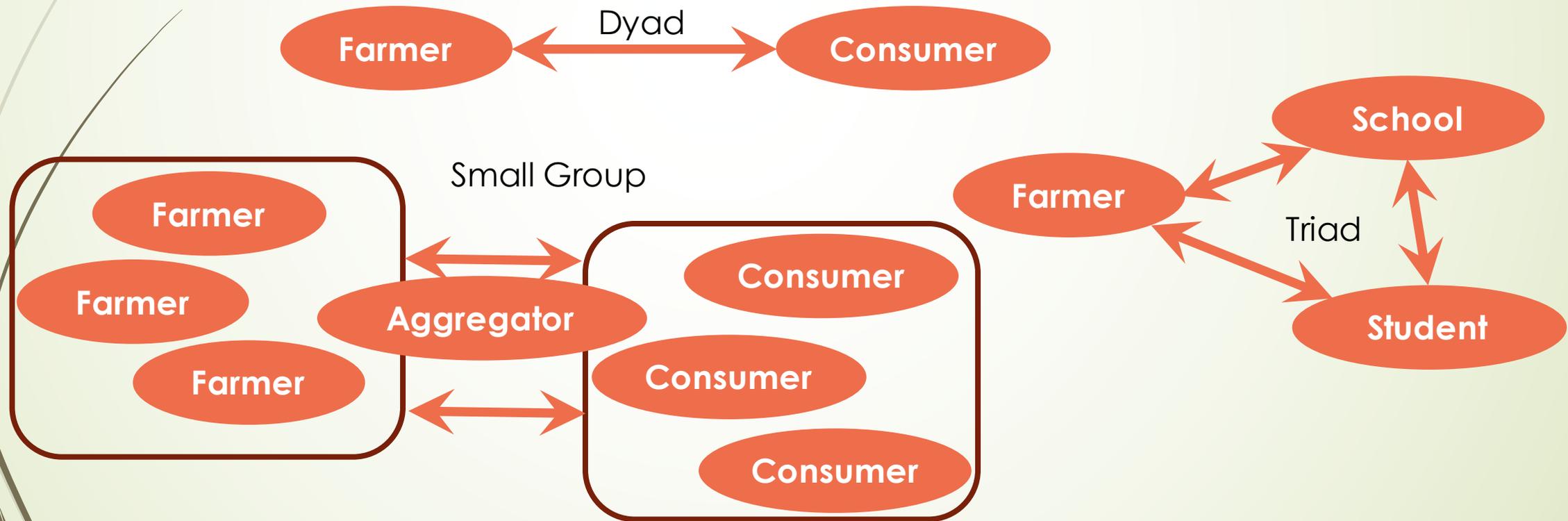


Civic Agriculture

- ▶ In what ways does the **increased profitability** for farmers **socially benefit** those communities where these farmers reside or farmers sell their products to?
- ▶ What makes local food systems what Tom Lyson (2004) called “**civic** agriculture”?
 - ▶ Strengthen community identities
 - ▶ Improved the community capacity to solve problems

All About Social Relationships

- “**Local**” as relational space (beyond geospatial)
- E.g., Face-to-face interactions, trusting relationships





Existing Literature

- ▶ The meaning of *social* to be sustained is still elusive.
 - ▶ Although you can find it everywhere in the literature...
 - ▶ Differences in the scale, scope, and focus of analysis make it difficult to sort out what are *indirect* and *direct* social impacts of LFSs.

Study of Social Sustainability

Scale of Analysis

Global

E.g., Fair trade (Jaffee 2014), food sovereignty (Holt-Gimenez 2011)

National

Food security, health (obesity), social inequality, education

Region/State

E.g., Sustainability/Resilience Index (SRI) (Green, Worstell & Ganarios 2017), intellectual capital flow (Schmit et al. 2017)

Local Communities (Country-level)

E.g., Food access & health outcome (Salois 2012; Deller, Canto & Brown 2017), community capacity building (Jablonski et al. 2016)

Households

E.g., Fresh produce intake (Rachine et al. 2010)

Individuals

E.g., Consumers' motivations (Feagan & Morris 2009), farmers' motivations (Local Food Linkage 2017), political eaters (Carolan 2017)

Social Impacts

At the Individual/Household Levels

➤ ***Motivations/Perceptions***

- Non-economic motivators drive farmers/consumers to participate in LFSs. (Carolan 2017; Fegan & Morris 2009; Local Food Linkages Project 2017)
 - Embedded relationships...

➤ ***Behavioral Change***

- Participation in LFSs affect farmers/consumers' behaviors as both market actors and "citizens". (Carolan 2017)
 - Deepening of knowledge
- Consumption of fresh produce increases, and thereby improving health outcomes. (Various dietetic, public health research, e.g., Rachine et al. 2010)

Social Impacts

At the Community Level

➤ *Health Outcomes*

- Improved food access in the community is likely to positively affect health outcomes of its residents (Salois 2012; Deller, Canto & Brown 2017).

➤ *Entrepreneurship/Capacity-Building*

- LFS development is built upon small-business entrepreneurship development, and therefore key to community-capacity building (Hinrichs & Charles 2012).
 - E.g., food hubs, food policy councils

Social Impacts

At the Conceptual Level

- Food security
- Food democracy
- Food sovereignty
- Health
- Social justice
- Self-determination
- Social equity, diversity and inclusion
- Community capacity building
- Community resilience

“...[L]ocal markets in themselves provide no automatic guarantee that vulnerable workers will experience enhanced welfare.”
(Hinrichs & Charles 2012)

Challenge 1.

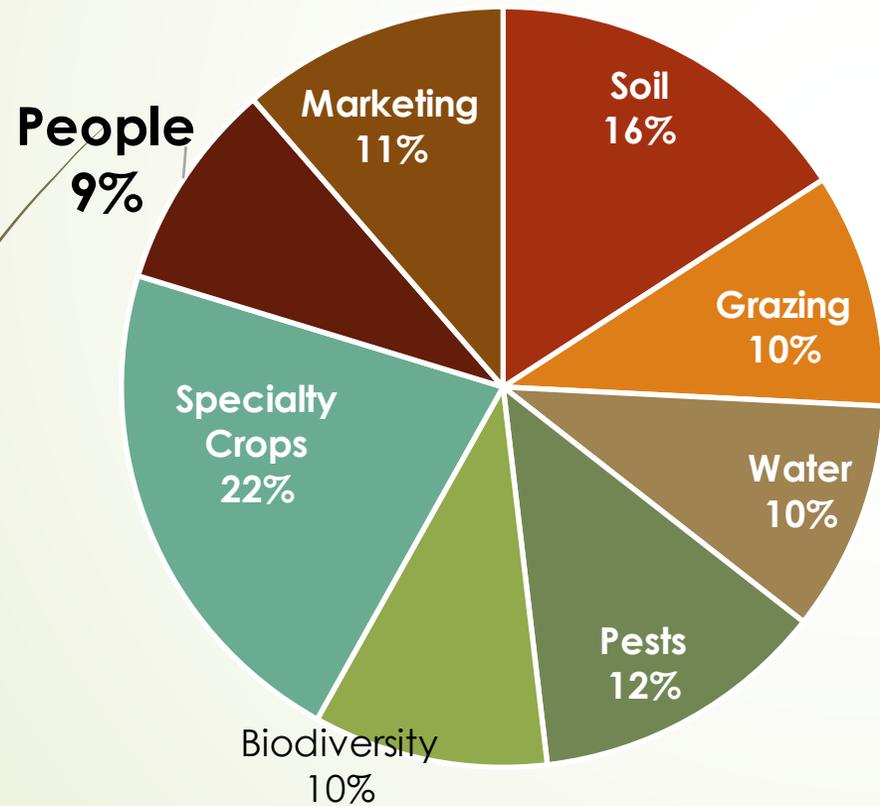
Investing on Social Sustainability

- The volume on the study of *social sustainability* is very small...

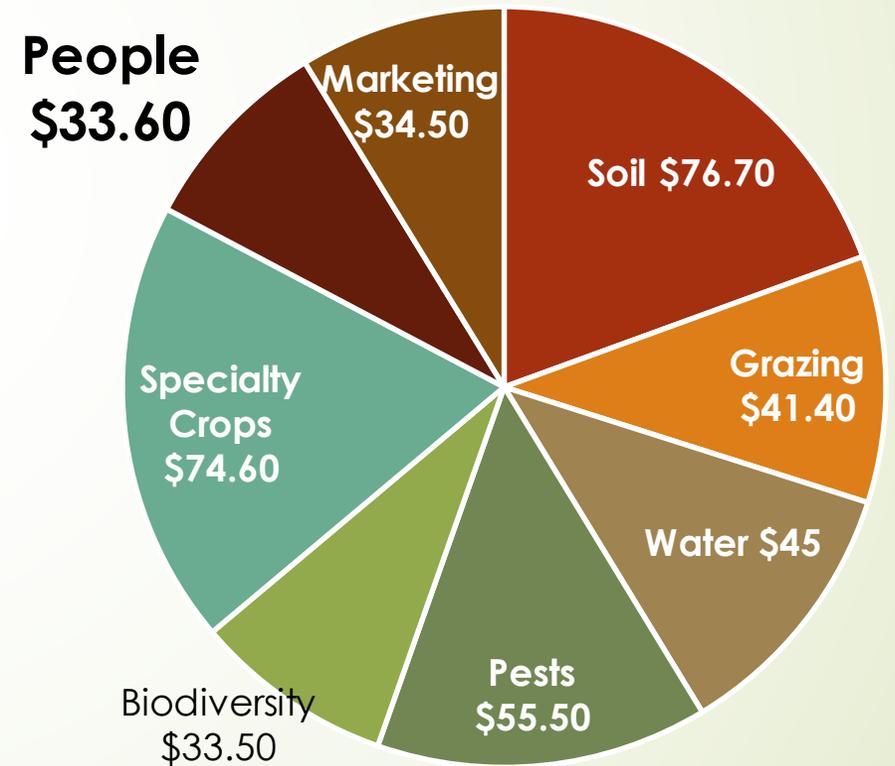
By the Numbers:

SARE Grants, 1988-2011

Number of Grants



\$ Million



Challenge 2.

Future of “Farming” (not agriculture)

- Even if LFSs are profitable for farmers...**who will farm?**
 - How does the vibrancy of LFSs make agriculture/farming as an **attractive career** path?
 - How does it help new farmers **access land**?

“Sorry, pretty much everyone:
young farmers are the least
diverse—and smallest—group
of farmers in the country”

by Nathan Rosenberg & Clay H. East, **The New
Food Economy** (3/20/18)

Challenge 3.

Exclusion/Alienation: Who Benefits?

- Who are excluded and alienated from LFSs? (Alkon & Agyeman 2011; Slocum 2008)
 - Rural consumers?
 - Non-LFS participating farmers in the rural area?
 - Non-LFS participating consumers in the urban area?
 - Farm labors?
 - Urban poor?
 - Minority farmers?

Challenge 3. (cont.)

Exclusion/Alienation: Who Benefits?

- ▶ In what ways the multiplier effects of LFSs in the urban community do contribute to addressing racial/ethnic divide in...
 - ▶ *health status*
 - ▶ *food insecurity*
 - ▶ *land access?*



Measuring Social Sustainability

- ▶ Community development aspects of LFSs in both the rural and urban areas need to further studied, particularly their impact on:
 - ▶ Diversity and inclusion of agrifood citizens,
 - ▶ Social justice of agrifood production
 - ▶ Capacity building/maintenance in these communities/neighborhoods.

Our Farms, Our Future: The Next 30 Year of Sustainable Agriculture

Recommendation (1)

- ▶ A systematic evaluation of the SARE-funded projects is necessary to understand what we already know about ***social sustainability***.
 - ▶ Social relationships at the individual level
 - ▶ Community capacity-building
- ▶ Need a more concerted effort by non-economic social scientists!

Our Farms, Our Future: The Next 30 Year of Sustainable Agriculture

Recommendation (2)

- More projects that specifically investigate various aspects of social sustainability need to be funded.
 - Economic sustainability should not be treated as proxy or prerequisite of social sustainability.

Our Farms, Our Future: The Next 30 Year of Sustainable Agriculture

Recommendation (3)

- SARE may expand the scope of *sustainable agriculture* to include vital non-farm production activities that farmers participate to build a local food system.
- Collaborations, learning and trust-building over community-work
- Leadership development and problem solving at the community-level
- Network building: Density and depth of networks

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Thank you!

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