

Alison M. Meadow

EVALUATING AND DESIGNING URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS: THE ROLE OF LOCAL INITIATIVES

Abstract:

In the search for solutions to environmental and human health problems linked to the dominant global food system, too much attention has been given to the scale of food systems and too little attention given to the specific practices and outcomes of various food system components and initiatives. The community of Fairbanks, Alaska is used to examine whether local food system initiatives can improve an urban food system's socially equity and environmental sustainability. Three studies of the current food system and nascent local food system were conducted. The first study examines community-wide physical and economic access to fresh foods in general and locally-grown foods in particular using surveys of local stores and spatial analysis of food outlet locations. The second study examines local food production at an individual scale at a community garden. Gardeners' reasons for participation, practices used, and amount of food produced are examined. A regionally-scaled study speculates about the region's ability to meet the community's food and nutritional needs using only local resources and develops a tool, the local food system footprint, to conduct such an assessment.

The studies found that locally-grown foods purchased at local outlets are less physically and economically accessible than comparable imports, however local foods tend to be grown using sustainable practices and travel shorter distances than imports. Gardeners tend to participate in the activity for personal enjoyment with food production