

# Using Networks to Build Collaborative & Equitable Food Systems

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## Bio

- Native of Newellton, LA
- Professor of Practice, School of Liberal Arts, Tulane University
  - **Faculty Advisory Committee**, Environmental Studies Program, Tulane University
  - **Adjunct Professor**, Agribusiness, Applied Economics and Agriscience Education, North Carolina A&T State University
  - **Member**, Racial Equity in the Food System Workgroup
  - **Advisory Committee**, Next California, World Wildlife Fund
  - **Board Member**, Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming (Ithaca, NY)
  - **Board Member**, AgLaunch (Memphis, TN)
  - **Board Member**, Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (Baton Rouge, LA)



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## What is a Food System?

A food system relates to all the steps and processes involved in growing, transforming, transporting, selling, and/or exchanging food and impacts a diverse base of individuals, businesses, and communities.



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## What is a Food System?

Food systems comprise the players and interactions along the food supply chain, from input supply and production of foods to transportation, processing, retailing, wholesaling, and preparation of foods, to consumption and eventual disposal/recycling.



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## The Evolution

- Lower-income families in urban and rural communities affected by the loss of smaller farms and food businesses and consolidation in the food retail industry.
- Less profitable supermarkets closing, creating areas where residents could not easily access fresh, healthy, and affordable food.
  - Lack of healthy food access is a significant contributor to poor health and chronic disease

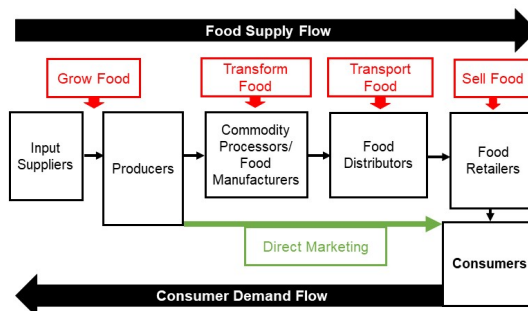
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## Understanding Food Access

**Food Access** → Agri-food system meeting consumer needs

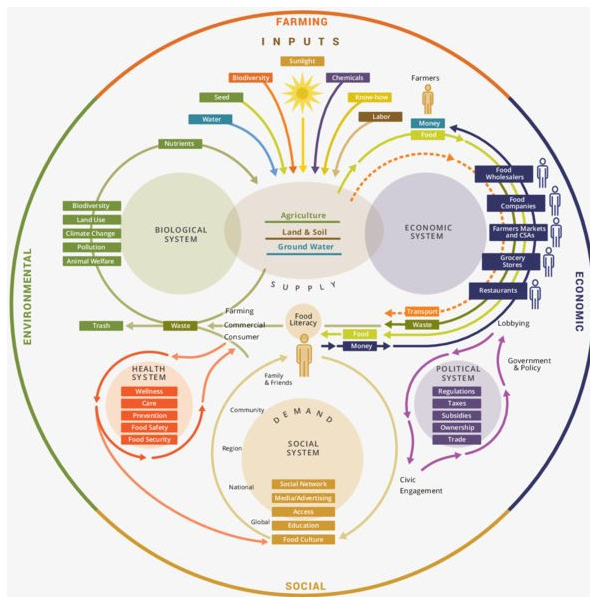
The agri-food system is divided into 4 categories:

1. Grow Food
2. Transform Food
3. Transport Food
4. Sell Food



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# Understanding Food Systems

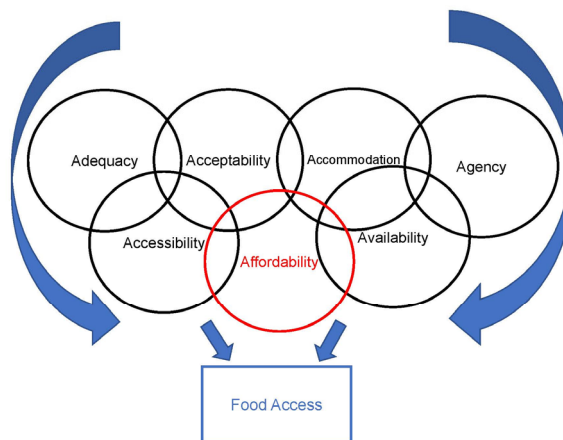


Zhang, Thorn, Gowdy et al, 2018

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# Framework for Food Access

The intersection of food access and the food system →  
 Acceptability, Accessibility, Accommodation, Affordability, & Availability (Caspi et al., 2012);  
 Adequacy (Rocha, 2007); Agency (Chappell, 2018)



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## Framework for Food Access

- **Affordability**
  - Food prices and people’s perceptions of food prices at locations where people purchase food
  - Budget considerations
- **Accessibility**
  - The ease to which people can get to a location where food is available
- **Availability**
  - The sufficiency of the amount of food supplied at locations where people acquire food
- **Accommodation**
  - How well local food sources accept and adapt to peoples’ needs (Andress & Fitch, 2016)
- **Acceptability**
  - People’s attitude regarding the attributes of their local food environment and whether the given supply of products meets their personal standards (Andress & Fitch, 2016)

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## Framework for Food Access

- **Adequacy**
  - Food that is nutritious and safe, needed to maintain healthy lifestyles (Rocha, 2007)
- **Agency**
  - People are empowered in defining and securing their rights, with respect to food security; and there are competent, responsive sociopolitical systems to enact and ensure these rights (Chappell, 2018).

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## High Functioning Networks

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- Cooperating Networks
  - Model and explain best practices, convene problem-solving sessions, and update each other on new projects (low risk but lead to little, if any, systems change).
- Coordinating Networks
  - Push organizational boundaries and engage in more interdependent activities that require mutual reliance (low to moderate risk and have a better chance for achieving systemic change).
- Collaborating Networks
  - Pursue fundamental, long-term system creation (These high-trust networks have the highest level of risk but the greatest chance for systems change).

Vandeventer and Mandell

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## Networks & Collaboration

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- Networks are more likely to reach goals and influence systems change when they foster a culture that values **complex reciprocity** (Holley, 2012)
  - Sharing information and resources with and assisting others without expecting direct reciprocation – helping others is the norm.
- Building, maintaining, and enhancing a strong collaboration infrastructure that values complex reciprocity has been an essential strategy in building food system networks to achieve important goals.

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## Network Sustainability

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- Adequate financial support for a strong collaboration infrastructure.
- Provide equitable, sustainable funding to MSIs.
  - Particularly 1890 and 1994 LGUs, expands their ability to provide support socially disadvantaged and marginalized communities.
- Create space for shared leadership and power across participants.
- Foster a culture of complex reciprocity where it is the norm for members to learn from and help one another achieve mutual goals.

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## Network Sustainability

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- Build in co-learning and accountability to your network or project team.
- Facilitate space where diverse leaders can share and address mutual challenges.
  - In a safe, power-sharing environment leaders can discover and appreciate the mutual goals.
  - Convening of a diverse network of stakeholders to assist with the formation of relevant projects and provide objective feedback.
- Create or designate a stable organization to serve as a foundation that can regularly convene stakeholders.

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**Questions?**

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