

# The University of Michigan Sustainable Food Systems Initiative

PROGRESS REPORT

Published May 2016



**The University of Michigan  
Sustainable Food Systems  
Initiative engages an  
interdisciplinary mix of  
students, faculty, and  
communities at local and  
global levels to learn from  
and build food systems  
that are health-promoting,  
economically viable,  
equitable, and  
ecologically sound.**

## **Dear Friends of SFSI,**

The University of Michigan is increasingly a top destination for students and faculty from around the world who seek to learn, teach, and study various aspects of sustainable food systems. The expertise at UM ranges from obesity prevention to agroecology to issues of equity, food sovereignty, and beyond. Over the past two years, the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative (SFSI) made tremendous strides in curriculum, community involvement, and contribution to global scholarship.

We launched a new undergraduate minor in Food and the Environment as well as a graduate certificate in Sustainable Food Systems. Each semester, new food systems courses are offered, and there are an increasing number of opportunities for students to get involved in relevant research and internships. We hired five new faculty members to support these programs as a part of the cluster hire in sustainable food systems.

Drawing upon epistemologies from both within and outside of the academy is a priority for SFSI. In May 2015, SFSI hosted a three-day food sovereignty conference with attendees from around the world, allying with local leaders as well as international scholars and activists from the Global South. That conference, and all SFSI events including film screenings, guest lectures, and edible research events are free and open to the community. We will continue to foster relationships and collaborations with community members, especially through the upcoming Food Literacy for All community-academic partnership course.

SFSI fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration and UM faculty continue to make meaningful contributions to food systems scholarship. Over the past several years, we evolved from an informal group of faculty members who are interested in food systems to a robust network of over 50 faculty and staff affiliates in seven academic units.

Looking ahead, a central goal of SFSI and a priority for the USDA-funded Food Citizenship Project is to increase diversity and inclusion in food systems studies.

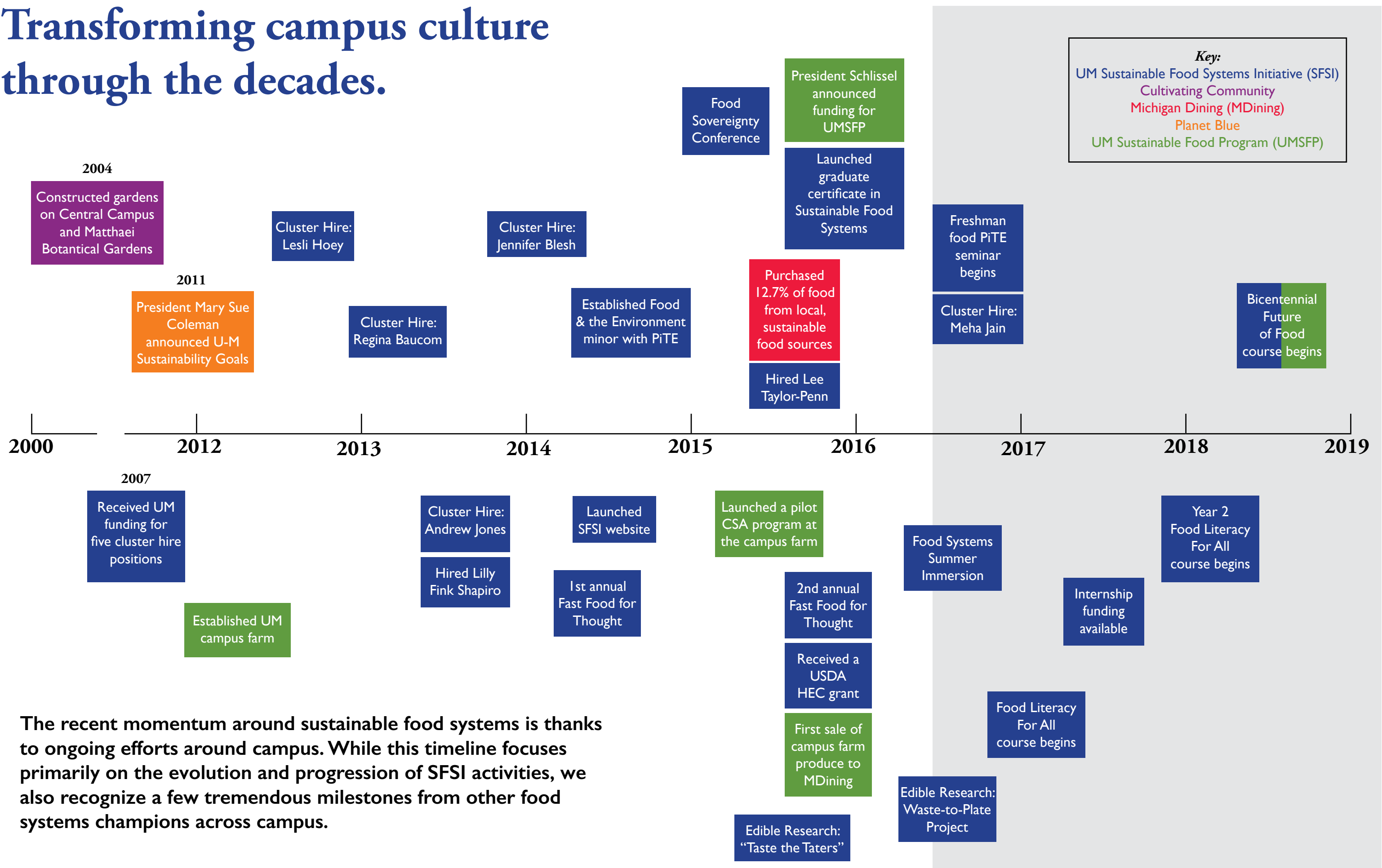
Sincerely,

*Ivette, Catherine, John, Larissa, & Mark*  
SFSI Advisory Board

*Lilly*  
Lead Coordinator



# Transforming campus culture through the decades.



The recent momentum around sustainable food systems is thanks to ongoing efforts around campus. While this timeline focuses primarily on the evolution and progression of SFSI activities, we also recognize a few tremendous milestones from other food systems champions across campus.

# Providing educational opportunities for students.

Launched in winter 2015, the **Food and the Environment minor** at the University of Michigan is one of the first such programs in the country. Housed under the LSA Program in the Environment, the minor consists of courses analyzing the current food system across a range of disciplines, documenting some of its unsustainable characteristics and proposing alternatives. This minor is intended for students with an interest in expanding their study of sustainable and equitable ways to produce and deliver nutritious food so as to improve people’s health and livelihoods.



The **graduate certificate in Sustainable Food Systems** is one focus area of the certificate in Sustainability offered through the School of Natural Resources and the Environment. The certificate includes coursework in fundamental knowledge and skill development, as well as an experiential learning capstone experience. By engaging in a capstone experience, such as an internship or fellows program, students are able to integrate their course learning into the practice of sustainability.



UM students visit Lesser Farm and Orchard in Dexter, MI

Alisanne Myers  
Student, Class of 2016



Is there a specific class or professor that sparked your interest in food systems?

Introduction to Food Systems and Food, Land, and Society taught by Catherine Badgley and Ivette Perfecto. They introduced us to basic principles of agroecology, before taking us to visit farms in Ann Arbor and Cuba. Not only did we see alternative strategies adapted across different cultures, but we also compared them to conventional tactics. This class taught me that sustainable food strategizing is not only of the utmost importance, but it is also fun and community oriented.

How do you envision incorporating your love for food systems into your future career?

I would like to run a healthy and environmentally conscious restaurant that is affordable and accessible.

## Course Spotlight

### Foundations of Sustainable Food Systems

co-taught by Andrew Jones, Jennifer Blesh, and Lesli Hoey

This course offers a unique opportunity for students to gain interdisciplinary knowledge of food systems and to integrate theory and practice through experiential learning and dialogue-based inquiry both on campus and in the community. Benefiting from collaborative interdisciplinary instruction that draws on the expertise of three professors from three different departments at the University of Michigan, students develop critical analysis, systems thinking, creativity and competencies in food sustainability from the perspectives of nutrition and public health, agroecology and the environment, and planning and policy.

# Investing in future leaders of the food system.

In fall 2015, we received a Higher Education Challenge grant from the US Department of Agriculture to increase student exposure to interdisciplinary approaches to agriculture and food systems. The two-year, \$150,000 grant seeks to engage undergraduate students, with particular emphasis on underrepresented populations. Titled **The UM Food Citizenship Project**, activities will begin in Summer 2016 and will continue until Summer 2018.



L to R: Cuban agroecologist Fernando Funes, urban farmer Myrtle Thompson Curtis, and SFSI affiliated faculty Ivette Perfecto at Feedem Freedom in Detroit

The project is coordinated by the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative and an interdisciplinary team of faculty from the School of Natural Resources and Environment and the Department of Nutritional Sciences in the School of Public Health. Other partners include the UM Campus Farm, Matthaei Botanical Gardens, and the UM Sustainable Food Program.

## The UM Food Citizenship Project will:

- Establish an educational program for first-year students aimed at early immersion in food systems. The project will facilitate summer orientation activities and a first-year seminar with a strong experiential learning component.
- Host an interdisciplinary lecture series, Food Literacy for All, in winter 2017 and 2018. The course, which is free and open to the public, will engage students and community members alike in the challenges and opportunities of current food systems.
- Launch an internship program in Summer 2017 to support underrepresented students pursuing food systems related summer experiences.

Margot Finn, PhD  
Faculty, University Courses



How will the freshman seminar course prepare students to engage with real world challenges?

The new freshman seminar course will explore different aspects of the food system—growing, processing, marketing, cooking and disposal—through lectures and experiential learning activities. Students will be encouraged to consider what, how and why certain decisions are made within both conventional and sustainable food systems.

What types of food systems issues are students engaging with both inside and outside of the classroom?

Students are focused on individual changes—like buying local and eating healthy. There is less of a focus on more systemic changes, such as labor issues.



# Engaging students, faculty, and the greater community.

In May 2015, we held an inaugural two-day food sovereignty conference in order to engage the scholarly and activist community in analyzing aspects of the “food sovereignty” movement. Emerging from the international grassroots organization, La Via Campesina, food sovereignty advocates for the rights of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.



Held at the School of Natural Resources and the Environment, the **Food Sovereignty: Local Struggles, Global Movement** conference featured professors, researchers, activists, and professionals from across the U.S. and abroad. Speakers and panelists discussed how food sovereignty can challenge the current agricultural system and move us towards a more just system that values people over profits.



Photo: Michigan Daily

Our signature event, **Fast Food for Thought**, is a high-energy speaker series on ten big topics in food and agriculture. Each fall, ten interdisciplinary UM faculty are chosen to share their research and ideas in a forum created to foster collaboration among faculty, staff, students, and community members. Past topics have included herbicide resistance, food security, childhood obesity, legal issues of urban agriculture, agroecology, and food sovereignty.

## SFSI by the numbers

220+

attendees at Fast Food for Thought each year

13

visiting lecturers

5

film screenings

11

videos on the SFSI youtube channel

Ben Iuliano  
Student, Class of 2018



Is there a specific class or professor that sparked your interest in food systems?

Food: The Ecology, Economics and Ethics of Eating with Professor Tom Princen will always stand out. The course introduced food system studies, challenged current narratives and practices, and illustrated potential solutions for the future. Class discussions demonstrated the value of interdisciplinary thinking, and how food issues affect all of our lives more than we initially think.

How do you envision incorporating your love for food systems into your future career?

In my future career, I plan to advocate for a national agriculture policy that is more conducive to sustainable, equitable food production and distribution.

# Supporting interdisciplinary pedagogy and research.



**Regina Baucom, PhD**  
Assistant Professor  
College of Literature, Science,  
and the Arts



**Jennifer Blesh, PhD**  
Assistant Professor  
School of Natural Resources  
and the Environment



**Lesli Hoey, PhD**  
Assistant Professor  
Taubman College of Architecture  
and Urban Planning



**Meha Jain, PhD** (starting Fall '16)  
Assistant Professor  
School of Natural Resources and  
the Environment



**Andrew Jones, PhD**  
Assistant Professor  
School of Public Health

## Research Spotlight

Regina Baucom is researching the genetics underlying herbicide resistance, the patterns of genome evolution across a landscape, and the potential for character displacement on below ground plant traits (roots). Her lab uses the common morning glory (*Ipomoea purpurea*) and its relatives for these questions.

Jennifer Blesh, Lesli Hoey, and Andrew Jones are studying the links between obesity, undernutrition, food security, household food production and variations in urban, peri-urban and rural food retail and policy environments, in both mountainous and tropical regions of Bolivia.

The **Sustainable Food Systems cluster hire** is part of a five-year, \$30-million initiative announced in 2007 by former UM President Mary Sue Coleman to recruit scholars whose work crosses boundaries and to bring experts from different fields together to explore significant questions or complex problems. The sustainable food systems cluster examines the path toward a sustainable and equitable food system, spanning the natural and social sciences.

We believe the university is the ideal place to forge the intellectual foundation that will inform and guide the construction of a coherent path toward a sustainable and equitable food system, helping to reinvigorate rural and urban communities, promote environmental protection, and enhance economies at state, national and international levels. Since joining UM, the cluster hires have established new courses on food systems, participated in food-related events, mentored students, and engaged in interdisciplinary research related to the environment, human health, and equity.



Sweet potatoes from Dr. Baucom's field site

## Food Access in Michigan

Grounded in the work of environmental justice scholar Dr. Dorceta Taylor, the USDA funded Food Access in Michigan Project utilizes an environmental justice framework to analyze Michigan's food system, researching the systemic causes of food insecurity.

**Alicia Alvarez, JD**  
Faculty, Law School



## How does your work relate to sustainable food systems?

I run the Community and Economic Development Law Clinic at the UM Law School, which strengthens community-based sustainable food organizations by supporting and creating capacity within the organization. Our clinic has worked with an urban farm and with a group that represents restaurant workers. We are always asking: What does justice mean at all levels of the food system? Some of the issues we've worked on include access to land, protecting names, and risk management. Last year, we worked with the Detroit People's Food Cooperative in creating their entity. They are currently exploring a physical space for a cooperatively owned grocery store in Detroit.

# Food Systems Scholarship

*examples of recent publications*

## The remarkable repeated evolution of herbicide resistance<sup>1</sup>

(2016). *American Journal of Botany*, 103 (2), pp. 1-3

Regina S. Baucom<sup>1</sup>

## Food craving as a mediator between addictive-like eating and problematic eating outcomes

Michelle A. Joyner<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ashley N. Gearhardt<sup>a</sup>, Marney A. White<sup>b,c</sup>

(2015). *Eating Behaviors*, 19: 98-101

## Food-related environmental beliefs and behaviours among university undergraduates

A mixed-methods study

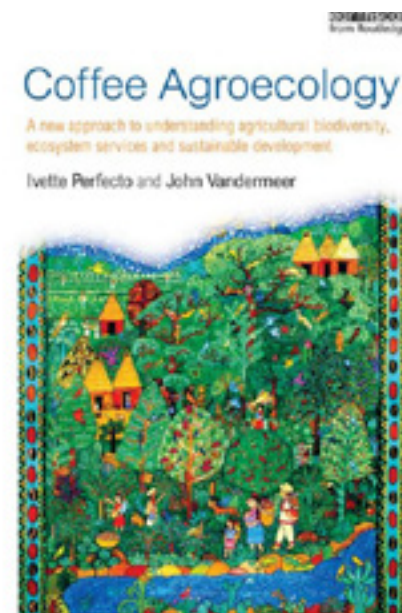
Victoria Campbell-Arvai

(2015). *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 16(3): 279-295

## Assessing the Potential and Limitations of Leveraging Food Sovereignty to Improve Human Health

Andrew D. Jones<sup>1\*</sup>, Lilly Fink Shapiro<sup>2</sup> and Mark L. Wilson<sup>3</sup>

*Frontiers in Public Health*, Vol. 3, Article 263: 1-10



(2015)

## An introduction to the Food & Fitness community partnerships and this special issue

Laurie Lachance<sup>a,\*</sup>, Laurie Carpenter<sup>a</sup>, Mary Emery<sup>b</sup> and Mia Luluquisen<sup>c</sup>

*Community Development*, 45 (3): 213-297

## [QA1] A Systematic Review of the Measurement of Sustainable Diets<sup>1-3</sup>

Andrew D Jones,<sup>4\*</sup> Lesli Hoey,<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Blesh,<sup>5</sup> Laura Miller,<sup>4</sup> Ashley Green,<sup>5</sup> and Lilly Fink Shapiro<sup>4</sup>

Schools of <sup>a</sup>Public Health and <sup>b</sup>Natural Resources and Environment, and <sup>c</sup>College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

(2016). *Advances in Nutrition*

## Greenhouse Gas Emission Estimates of U.S. Dietary Choices and Food Loss

Martin C. Heller and Gregory A. Keoleian

(2015). *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 19 (3): 391-401

## Informing Lake Erie Agriculture Nutrient Management via Scenario Evaluation

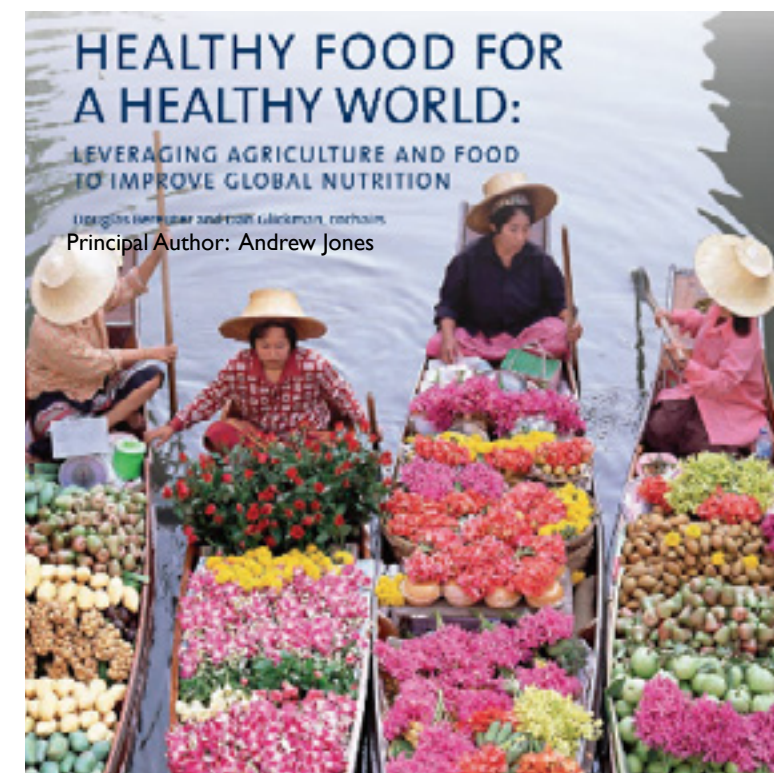
Donald Seavia<sup>1</sup>, Margaret Kalcic<sup>1</sup>, Rebecca Logsdon Muenich<sup>1</sup>, Noel Aloysius<sup>2</sup>, Chelsie Boles<sup>3</sup>, Remegio Confesor<sup>4</sup>, Joseph DePinto<sup>3</sup>, Marie Gildow<sup>2</sup>, Jay Martin<sup>2</sup>, Jennifer Read<sup>1</sup>, Todd Redder<sup>1</sup>, Scott Sowa<sup>5</sup>, Yu-Chen Wang<sup>1</sup>, and Haw Yen<sup>6</sup>

Compiled by the University of Michigan Water Center with funding from the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation

## Student Interest in Campus Community Gardens: Sowing the Seeds for Direct Engagement with Sustainability

Raymond De Young, Kif Scheuer, James Roush and Kate Kozeleski

In W. Leal Filho and M. Zint (Eds.) *The Contribution of Social Sciences to Sustainable Development at Universities* World Sustainability Series. Pp. 161-175, Switzerland: Springer.



(2015)

Sara Soderstrom, PhD  
Faculty, Organizational Studies



**How has the sustainable food systems initiative facilitated collaboration among faculty members from various academic disciplines?**

Through the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative, I have been able to formally collaborate with other faculty and more informally dialogue with many faculty members about sustainable food systems research. This area is so multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary that having such a large group of active researchers is really helpful in all stages of the research process: designing research projects, getting access to research sites, integrating different expertise, and sharing findings. I am grateful for this community as it makes my research and its potential impacts stronger.

# Advisory Board

**Catherine Badgley, PhD**  
Professor of Ecology and  
Evolutionary Biology, College of  
Literature, Science, and the Arts  
Research Scientist in the Museum  
of Paleontology

**Larissa Larsen, PhD**  
Associate Professor of Urban  
and Regional Planning, Taubman  
College of Architecture and Urban  
Planning

**Ivette Perfecto, PhD**  
Professor of Ecology, Natural  
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School of Natural Resources and  
Environment

**Mark Wilson, ScD**  
Professor of Epidemiology, School  
of Public Health  
Professor of Ecology and  
Evolutionary Biology, College of  
Literature, Science, and the Arts

**John Vandermeer, PhD**  
Professor of Ecology and  
Evolutionary Biology, College of  
Literature, Science, and the Arts  
Professor of Natural Resources  
and Environment, School of Natu-  
ral Resources and Environment

## *Affiliated Faculty Members*

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Shannon Brines, MEng SNRE  
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Mark Wilson, ScD LSA/SPH

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Manager, Sustainable Food Program  
Juli McLoone  
Outreach Librarian and Curator, Special  
Collections Library  
Adrienne O'Brien  
Collections and Natural Areas Specialist,  
Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols  
Arboretum  
Maren Spolum  
Research Manager, Food Access in  
Michigan Project  
Emily Springfield  
Academic Projects Manager  
Keith Soster  
Director of Student Engagement, Michigan  
Dining

## *SFSI Staff Members*

Lilly Fink Shapiro, MPH  
Lead Coordinator  
Lee Taylor-Penn  
Coordinator

## *Key:*

CE-College of Engineering  
LSA-College of Literature, Science, &  
the Arts  
Ross-Ross School of Business  
SPH-School of Public Health  
SNRE-School of Natural Resources &  
Environment  
Stamps-Stamps School of Art & Design  
Taubman-Taubman College of  
Architecture & Urban Planning



Not pictured: Larissa Larsen

### *Photo Credit*

Lilly Fink Shapiro

### *Collaborators*

Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice  
MEnvoys  
Michigan Solidarity Network with Mexico  
Slow Food Huron Valley  
UM New World Agriculture and Ecology Group  
UM Sustainable Food Program

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Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
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Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
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School of Public Health  
School of Natural Resources and Environment  
Slow Food Huron Valley  
Student Advocates for Nutrition  
UM Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
USDA  
Whole Foods Market



*UM students studying urban agriculture in Cuba meet with a local butcher outside of an organopónico in Havana*

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