

## **Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future Topical Lunch Follow-Up Report**

**TITLE:** Seeking Empirical Evidence of Food Sovereignty

**HOSTS:** Karim-Aly Kassam, International Professor of Environmental and Indigenous Studies, Department of Natural Resources & American Indian Program; Rebecca Nelson, Professor of Plant Pathology and Plant Microbe Biology, and Scientific Director for the McKnight Foundation's Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP).

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 17, 2015; 12:00 – 1:15 PM; 300 Rice Hall

**SUMMARY:** The goals of this topical lunch were to 1) share the results of a workshop on food sovereignty that was supported by the ACSF Rapid Response Fund and 2) to build a transdisciplinary approach to gather empirical evidence to examine food sovereignty as a process to achieve sustainable food security. Food sovereignty is a process that is context specific, and therefore, must take into account ecological possibilities, knowledge capacity, cultural values, nutritive significance, rights to self-determination, and effective social governance structures. Historically, trade between ecological regions has facilitated food sovereignty. As a consequence of these diverse elements, it has been challenging to assess food sovereignty based on empirical evidence. However, assessment tools for food sovereignty may help households, communities, civil society organizations, and government agencies identify their accomplishments and prioritize policies and actions. Such empirical studies can enable cross-contextual evaluation and facilitate collaboration between regions with complementary strengths.

Prior to the beginning of the topical lunch, a brief entry survey distributed to everyone upon entering 300 Rice. The survey asked participants to list five words or terms that they associate with food sovereignty. The topical lunch began with a presentation by Dr. Karim-Aly Kassam, in which he described the results of the workshop, 'Visioning Food, Health and Energy Sovereignty', led by himself and four members of his research group at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology in Bumthang, Bhutan in June of 2014. This workshop, and attendance at the Congress, was made possible by an Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future Rapid Response Fund Grant. Dr. Kassam explained that the 45 workshop participants were members of indigenous communities, practitioners and ethnobiologists from 25 countries who work in 29 countries. Working in groups, workshop participants identified 120 questions to assess food sovereignty, which were categorized into 11 themes of inquiry. They also identified a rich suite of skills that they can contribute to food sovereignty initiatives.

Building on the results of the workshop, Dr. Kassam introduced everyone in attendance at the topical lunch, explaining why each person had been invited by highlighting expertise that could contribute to research on food sovereignty. The results of the entrance survey were synthesized into a word cloud to allow instant visualization of major concepts that attendees relate to food sovereignty and inform subsequent discussion. Dr. Kassam proposed five future endeavors related to food sovereignty that could be grounded at Cornell: 1) a graduate seminar; 2) a workshop to develop assessment tools; 3) empirical research at three sites; 4) an art exhibit at the Johnson Museum; and 5) an Atkinson Center Venture Fund grant proposal.

The presentation was followed by a productive discussion among attendees about the endeavors proposed by Dr. Kassam. Several participants discussed the need to articulate a broadly inclusive theoretical framework of food sovereignty, which would inform approaches taken in empirical research, as well as choice of field sites. Others stressed the importance of governance to food sovereignty, and noted the need for analysis at multiple scales in addition to

the community level that had been emphasized. Attendees also proposed offering a multidisciplinary course on food sovereignty to undergraduates, potentially through a partnership with Engage Cornell, by creating service learning opportunities, or by including the topic in existing or planned curricular offerings. Local engagement, including a case study based in New York, was stressed, and connections with 4H Healthy Living Youth Ambassadors were proposed.

Following the lunch, participants were contacted directly and asked to offer other suggestions for next steps, as well as indicate to which of the proposed activities they would contribute. Dr. Kassam and Dr. Nelson are grateful to the ACSF for providing an opportunity to convene faculty from 11 departments and programs to foster productive collaboration around this important topic.

25 in attendance including two hosts and additional two guests (updated 2/17/2015).

**Organizers:**

Last Name	First Name	NetID	Department	College
Kassam	Karim-Aly S.	ksk28	Natural Resources	CALS
Nelson	Rebecca	rjn7	Plant Pathology	CALS
DiSalvo	Frank	fjd3	Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future	
Carpenter	Charlie		guest, Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future	N/A
Carpenter	Sue		guest, Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future	N/A

**Participants:**

Last Name	First Name	NetID	Department	College
Arthur	Cally	caa9	International Programs	CALS
Baumflek	Michelle	mjb235	Natural Resources	CALS
Chambliss	Lauren	elc55	Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future	
Colfer	Carol	cjc59	CIIFAD	CALS
Dietrich	David	dd355	Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future	
Dunaway	Mike	mjd388	Natural Resources	CALS
Gannon	Nigel	tng22	Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research	CHE
Gomez	Miguel	mig7	Applied Economics and Management	CALS
Hobbs	Peter	ph14	Crop and Soil Sciences	CALS
Lassoie	Jim	jpl4	Natural Resources	CALS
McCandless	Linda	llm3	International Programs	CALS
McMichael	Philip	pdm1	Developmental Sociology	CALS
Medvecky	Beth	bam44	CIIFAD	CALS
Milgroom	Michael	mgm5	Plant Pathology	CALS
Morreale	Steve	sjm11	Natural Resources	CALS
Power	Alison	agp4	Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	CAS
Ruelle	Morgan	mlr245	Natural Resources	CALS
Schneider	Rebecca	rls11	Natural Resources	CALS
Tucker	Terry	twt2	International Agriculture and Rural Development	CALS
Weislogel	Andy	aw27	The Johnson Museum	

**Regrets:** Alice Pell, Davydd Greenwood, Chris Barret, Sarah Evanega, Wes Sine, Jane Fajans, Matthew Evangelista, Bob Everett, Wendy Wolford, Gerald Torres, Dawit Solomon, Jeffrey Wall, Michael Gore