

**2014 AFRI SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS PD MEETING (Sept 29, 2014)  
PROCEEDINGS INSTRUCTIONS**

**I. PROJECT DATA**

**Project Title:** Food Dignity: Action research on engaging food insecure communities and universities in building sustainable community food systems  
**Award number:** 2011-68004-30074  
**Period of funding:** 4/2011 – 3/2016  
**Primary Institution:** University of Wyoming  
**Project Director:** Christine M. Porter, University of WY, 307-766-2143, Christine.Porter@uwyo.edu  
**Co-Project Director Names and emails:** N/A

**Additional Project Data Table**

Item	Detail
<b>Total award, and amount received so far</b>	<b>5-yr total:</b> \$4,978,710 <b>4 years awarded to 3/15:</b> \$3,982,968
<b>Collaborating institutions with sub-awards</b>	Feeding Laramie Valley (FLV) of Action Resources International; Blue Mountain Associates (BMA); Cornell University; Whole Community Project (WCP) of Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County; Center for Popular Research, Education, and Policy; Dig Deep Farms and Produce (DDF&P) of Deputy Sheriff’s Activity League; East New York Farms (ENYF!) of United Community Centers.
<b>Collaborating institutions without sub-awards</b>	Ithaca College
<b>Project Website</b>	<a href="http://www.fooddignity.org">www.fooddignity.org</a>
<b>Funding leverage received so far</b>	\$177,000 (for multiple-partner work; excludes leverage by individual partners who have each leveraged \$50,000-\$250,000)

**II. Training**

Undergraduates –degrees received: 0 (over 300 involved in FD-related course work and action)  
 Graduates – degrees received: 1  
 Undergraduates – active: 0  
 Graduate students – active: 6  
 Post Docs: 0  
 Minority Students: 1

**III. IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT**

In the US and globally, we are precipitously close to peak oil, peak soil, and a tipping point for atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations. We are draining our aquifers for crop irrigation, so much so we are changing the earth’s gravitational pull and many of our major rivers no longer reach the ocean year round. Over a billion people were undernourished in 2009, the highest number in the 40 years for which comparable statistics have been available. Within the US, wage inequality has been rising and today’s SNAP/Food Stamp participation rates are breaking records, with circa one in eight Americans enrolled. In the face of these threats, many communities are making paths to a brighter future by building community food systems that aim to nourish everyone in current and future generations. Food Dignity is a five-year initiative to trace these paths taken by five US communities and to collaborate in mapping and traveling the most appropriate and effective roads forward for creating sustainable community food systems that build food security.

**IV. PROJECT SUMMARY**

“The people hold thousands of solutions in their hands,” notes a 2010 Via Campesina declaration. Core research questions in Food Dignity include: who are the people, what are these solutions, how can our society best enable citizens to implement them, and how does the implementation impact community food systems? Our research, extension and education project includes five community food system organizations, two universities, one college, and one action-think tank. Our research priorities are (a) case studies of the five community food system organizations and one of our work to build equitable and effective research partnerships between academic and community partners, (b) evaluation of the “community support package” community food system partner organizations are using including evaluation of minigrant programs, and (c) quantification of garden harvests.

## V. OBJECTIVES

Our primary objective is to identify, develop and evaluate scalable strategies for organizing sustainable community food systems (SCFS) for food security (FS). This includes (a) developing and comparing retrospective and ongoing case studies of SCFS for FS work in 5 communities; (b) testing and evaluating a SCFS organizing support “package” with each community; and (c) evaluating the SCFS for FS impact of minigrants, some home and community food gardens, and selected community initiatives as nested case studies. A secondary objective is to expand capacity to catalyze, support and research SCFS for FS in cooperative extension, community-based organizations, citizens living in low-income communities, and universities. Strategies for this this include: (a) creating new undergraduate cross-disciplinary minor areas of study in sustainable food systems at University of Wyoming (UW) and Cornell University (Cornell); and (b) conducting a sixth case study of the Food Dignity project itself.

## VI. RESULTS

**Community Case Studies:** Community partners in Food Dignity have historically tended to focus on micro-to-mini scale vegetable production or production facilitation, developing technical skills, cultivating and mentoring community leaders (including youth), improving access to fruits and vegetables, creating income generation opportunities, undoing racism, and networking people and organizations relevant to food systems. Arenas with less action have included national or state policy change; labor and gender issues; food processing, transport and waste; medium to large scale production; and raising animals other than bees. Mentoring and supporting leadership development among people and communities most impacted by food insecurity is a top but hugely under-funded priority.

**Support Package:** One partner organization described the benefits of the support package: “The biggest assets... have been the longevity, the flexibility, and the degree of control over the use of funding. Change takes time, and the length of Food Dignity’s investment in our work has allowed us to grow, change, and plan for the future. With that, we have found that the flexibility has really allowed us to be honest about the fact that we were going to learn a lot along the way, and that we would continue to develop our ideas about how to best utilize the package. Finally, we have had a great deal of control over how to use our support package (in contrast to many foundation and government grants), which allows us to define the terms and parameters of our work.” However, a one-size package does not fit all. The support package cannot support an entire organization, a particular problem for the “youngest” organizations in the partnership. Additionally, managing many small amounts for minigrants and stipend-based work (e.g. community researchers or organizers) is a burden for smaller organizations. Given the same resources, some organizations might prefer to support more staff time. Each partner has at least in part used the package, as one community partner puts it, “as an investment in attracting, cultivating, and supporting food systems leaders of all ages in our community.”

### **Selected results from minigrants and other community initiatives:**

- Half of the participants in a gardening workshop received \$40 microgrants. Grantees were significantly more likely to start new gardens and to expand existing gardens than controls.

- BMA has founded and hosted four successful seasons of the Wind River Indian Reservation Farmers Market. In 2013 they hosted eight markets with 57 vendor stalls over the season. It provides opportunities for buying local food (the only one on the reservation), for vendor families to make a little money, and for social capital building. BMA has partly used minigrants to support Native American families in becoming vendors at the markets. In the 2010 pilot phase, all the vendors were white. Now the vast majority are tribal members and, as BMA's executive director notes, "they [market patrons] took a lot of pride in the fact that it was their people who had accomplished this."
- Pride, connectedness, leadership development, and economic development have been themes in the reported benefits of the minigrant programs (over 50 projects have been or are being supported to date) which, overall, are one of the most appreciated parts of the support package along with travel and leadership development support.
- 51 gardeners, with a wide range of experience, who are tending home and community plots in Laramie, WY and Ithaca, NY weighed every harvest for an entire growing season in 2013. Per square foot, in each location they produced as much or more food than vegetable farms yield on average. In Laramie, the average 300 ft<sup>2</sup> plot produced enough vegetables to supply an adult with the USDA-recommended 2.5 cups a day for two-thirds of a year. Over half the gardeners are participating for another season in 2014.

**Project Case Study:** The Food Dignity collaboration is proving to be a potent learning ground for how universities, extension, and community based organizations can and should collaborate on action research in food systems. The partnership and its approach has been called "groundbreaking" by national leaders and won the Community Campus Partnerships for Health annual award in 2014. Key strategies have included sharing funding, investing in leadership development, creating a cross-organizational team of project advisors and leaders, and hiring people who are adept at bridging the many "worlds" in which members of this very diverse team live. Having five years for this work (rather than a more usual two to three year project) has also been essential for our ability to conduct this action research together. The new, team-authored values statement (available on our website under About) largely captures the process practices to which we aspire and which have enabled our work. From an academic standpoint, it helps to frame this work not as trans-disciplinary, but post-disciplinary, and to follow activists in the food movement as the primary experts; many have been leading this work for decades longer than most academic disciplines (much less individual academics) have been paying attention to it.

## VII. RESEARCH OUTPUTS/ DELIVERABLES

### Publications

- Porter, C.M., & Redmond, L. (2014). Labor and leadership: Women in US community food organizing. In J. Page-Reeves (Ed.), *Women Redefining the Experience of Food Insecurity: Life Off the Edge of the Table*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group. pp 261-283. Excerpt at <http://womenlandandlegacy.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/excerpt-porter-redmond-gender-labor-lead-us-food-movement.pdf>
- Porter, C.M., Herrera, H., Marshall D. & Woodsum, G.M., (2014) "(2014) "Shared voices, different worlds: process and product in the Food Dignity action research project." *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*. 7(1) 116-128. (<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/ijcre/article/view/3399/4043>)
- Porter, C.M., Sequeira, E.J. & Woodsum, G.M. (2013) "Who is 'the public' in public health and food systems: examining community food organizing and health collaborations in New York and in Wyoming" and (2011) "Community Politics and Leadership in Food In/Security: networks, issues and observations in Albany County, Wyoming and Tompkins County, New York." Reports to Kettering Foundation.
- Pelletier, D.L., Porter, C.M., Aarons, G.A., Wuehler S.E., and Neufeld, L.M. (2013) "Expanding the Frontiers of Population Nutrition Research: New Questions, New Methods, and New Approaches." *Advances in Nutrition*. 4; 92-114. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23319128>).

- Bradley, K. and Galt, R.E. (2013) "Practicing food justice at Dig Deep Farms & Produce, East Bay Area, California: self-determination as a guiding value and intersections with foodie logics." *Local Environment*. ([www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13549839.2013.790350#.U8gJzvldWaE](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13549839.2013.790350#.U8gJzvldWaE))
- Porter, C.M. (2013). "Community action to prevent childhood obesity: Lessons from three US case studies." *Childhood Obesity*. 9(2) 164-174. (<http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/chi.2012.0018>)

#### Online briefs, blogs and other dissemination

- Over 30 national presentations and posters to date and dozens of local ones.
- East New York Farms Case Study (<http://prezi.com/kixjpppdqbqz/enyf-retrospective-case-study>)
- Ithaca Garden Harvest Log Blog (<http://blogs.cornell.edu/ithacaharvestlog>)
- *Storying the Foodshed: A public narrative project in Tompkins County, NY* (<http://blogs.cornell.edu/foodstories>). Also *Engaging Stories* ([www.pokesalad.info/engagingstories](http://www.pokesalad.info/engagingstories))
- Presentation as part of the April 2013 AFRI “Enhancing Food Security of Underserved Populations in the Northeast through Sustainable Regional Food Systems” webinar.
- A new brief on building successful markets based on ENYF’s experience ([www.fooddignity.org/about/food-dignity-presentations/briefs](http://www.fooddignity.org/about/food-dignity-presentations/briefs)).
- Invited participation in the Beyond the Farm Bill policy-change forum hosted by Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in March 2014.

#### Media Coverage – recent highlights

- A front-page story in a local paper about the overall project inspired by the 4<sup>th</sup> Food Dignity team meeting held in May 2013 for Associated Press. It appeared in every major Wyoming newspaper and several national outlets.<sup>1</sup>
- Media and social media coverage for Food Dignity receiving the 2014 CCPH Award. The award plaque reads: “In recognition of your ability to mobilize community and academic partners to collaboratively build sustainable community food systems to achieve food security, we hereby present Food Dignity with the 2014 Community Campus Partnerships for Health Award. Your outstanding model of community-driven collaborative research and action is an inspiration to us all.”<sup>2</sup>
- An article about the harvest measures by Laramie gardeners<sup>3</sup> and two front-page articles about the Wind River Indian Reservation Farmer’s market in the *Wind River News*.

### VIII. OUTCOMES/ IMPACTS

Our primary research outcome is newly codified knowledge and understanding of strategies and outcomes for community-based and led SCFS for FS work including new organizational and institutional approaches to foster “food democracy” and security being trialed and disseminated. Examples include:

- New sustainability undergraduate minor at UW with a food systems track started Sept 2013 and new courses or adaptations to existing courses at UW, CU and IC reaching over 300 students to date with SCFS for FS perspectives and knowledge, with a subset also gaining mentored practice experience (see e.g., [www.laramieboomerang.com/articles/2013/11/30/news/doc52993b6aef4a6813065475.txt](http://www.laramieboomerang.com/articles/2013/11/30/news/doc52993b6aef4a6813065475.txt)).
- Community mentors (with financial compensation) co-leading minor and student engagement development with faculty at UW, CU and IC.
- Empirically demonstrated that per-acre productivity of home and community gardens in Laramie, WY and Ithaca, NY approximates or exceeds that of vegetable farms.

<sup>1</sup> Newman, E for AP. UW research project supports community food systems.” *Laramie Boomerang*, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Online at <http://www.laramieboomerang.com/articles/2013/05/28/news/doc51a3de9ae6da8196703697.txt>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://ccph.memberclicks.net/annual-award-winners-2014> and sample coverage at <http://cornellcals.tumblr.com/post/91153640930/food-dignity-project-garners-national-recognition>

<sup>3</sup> Newman, E. "Nutritionally Meaningful: Study aims to bust stereotypes about home gardens." *Laramie Boomerang*, Feb 12th, 2014. pp. A7. <http://www.fooddignity.org/images/galleries/flv/garden/FLV%2014-02-12%20media%20Laramie%20Boomerang%20Nutritionally%20Meaningful%20Study%20aims%20to%20bust%20stereotypes%20about%20home%20gardens.png>

- Supported over 100 community members in leadership development, action and/or research in SCFS for FS work they have designed. For example, WCP took community leaders on Food Policy Tours to Detroit and Baltimore.
- The support above, in turn, has enabled community organizations to engage new partners and expand their reach and impact; for example, in ENYF! this has included an afterschool program for middle-school youth, an alternative school for over-aged, under-credited young adults and a new multi-organization collaboration (including NYC Parks Department) that supports garden coordinators.
- Leveraged \$142,000 in support to pilot a randomized controlled trial evaluating the health impacts of home gardens with Wyoming-based partners.
- The farmers' markets on the Wind River Indian Reservation expanded food access and revenue generation opportunities on the reservation. Additionally, the market manager observed that the market is "the only place that whites, Shoshones, and Arapahos socialize."
- Largely due to the results of the community harvest measures research, a City of Laramie Recreation policy proposal has slated six additional city parks to host community gardens. Using harvest data and a 2014 collaboration to monitor water usage in gardens, Feeding Laramie Valley is also working for a policy to reduce water rates for people who grow food in their yards.