

Sustainable Food Systems 101



What are they?

Sustainable food systems:

- Produce diverse, fresh, and nutritious foods.
- Yield enough to feed everyone, regardless of income level or geographic location.
- Enable farmers to financially support themselves.
- Maintain soil fertility now and for future generations.
- Utilize methods that are not harmful to our environment.
- Foster healthy eco-systems and biodiversity.

What are the main obstacles?

Obstacle:	Effects:
Prevalence of chemicals, synthetics, hormones, antibiotics and genetically-modified organisms in farming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contaminated fresh water supply from pesticide run-off and excessive animal waste from “factory farms”. (The #1 urgent health issue according to the United Nations.) ▪ Creation of dead zones in our oceans from chemical run-off. (The #1 top environmental threat according to the United Nations.) ▪ Chemical residues on produce that lead to illness and disease. (Confirmed by countless international studies.) ▪ Degraded soil fertility. ▪ Increased human resistance to antibiotics. ▪ Unknown danger of introducing genetically-modified organisms into our food supply and natural habitats. (Studies have shown that 60-75% of produce in supermarkets is genetically modified.)
Inefficient distribution channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numerous middlemen between farms and the final consumer, deeply cutting into the profits of the producer. ▪ Inability of small, family farms to effectively supply their customers. ▪ Global hunger—International studies have shown that world hunger is not so much an issue of food production as it is an issue of <i>access</i>.
Government subsidies to agri-businesses that use chemicals, antibiotics, synthetics, hormones, GMOs, and other controversial substances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promotion of farming practices that are harmful to us and the environment. ▪ Difficulty for small, local farms that practice conscientious methods to be financially viable. ▪ Decreased crop diversity—Recipients of subsidies are often required to switch from bio-diverse crops that thrive in their particular region to fewer, conventional crops for large-scale export. (Mono-cropping also degrades soil fertility.)
Large, vertically-integrated companies that grow, process, and package foods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commodity prices set at artificially low levels by companies that have financial reserves to do so. (Their income comes predominately from processed goods.) ▪ Non-integrated, smaller farms forced to match the same low price, eventually being forced out of business or bought by their corporate competitors. ▪ Replacement of conscientious stewards of the land with large agri-businesses, which mostly use unsustainable farming methods.

Unregulated global trade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fewer, multinational companies controlling the majority of the world's food supply. ▪ Fewer farmers responsible for larger areas of land. ▪ Fewer types of produce—Varieties are chosen for their durability and shelf-life. Agri-businesses strive for maximum output and lowest overhead. ▪ Food traveling an average of 1500-2500 miles and 7-14 days to get to your plate. ▪ More fossil fuels used in transportation. ▪ Decreased food nutritional value.
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What are some solutions?

Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn more about the issues surrounding our food supply, and spread the word! ▪ Teach children the environmental and nutritional value of sustainably-produced foods with hands-on programs or community/school gardens.
Local, organic farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buy organic when possible. As demand for sustainably-produced foods increases, prices will decrease and become more accessible. ▪ Support local economies and farms by buying direct at farmers' markets, through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) delivery programs, or from co-ops. ▪ Reduce chemicals and GMOs in our farmland by helping conventional farms learn about organic farming and how to transition to sustainable methods.
Conscientious businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support stores and restaurants that sell or use foods from local, sustainable farms.
Innovative distribution models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce the number of middlemen between farmer and consumer. ▪ Help small, family farms consolidate resources for more effective marketing, sales, and delivery. ▪ Develop programs that help lower-income people access affordable, quality foods. ▪ Follow the lead of new distribution models that have proven successful abroad, such as farmer-owned retail co-ops and government incentives.
Non-profit organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support non-profit organizations that progress the movement via research, resources, new programs, and immediate community change.
Revised government policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vote for politicians who support a sustainable agricultural industry. ▪ Sign online petitions for food and farm reform.

Resources

Om Organics is a nonprofit organization that helps local farms sell directly to Bay Area restaurants and educates the community about the availability and benefits of local, sustainable agriculture.

<http://www.omorganics.org>

San Francisco Food Systems addresses food systems issues within the City and County of San Francisco through action research projects, policy planning and recommendations.

<http://www.sffoodsystems.org>

To submit corrections or changes, please email us at info@omorganics.org.