



NOURISH DIALOGUE DINNERS

*Bringing diverse stakeholders together for dinner, conversation
and insights to advance sustainable food systems*



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“It’s good to get out and talk with each other and it’s special to have nontraditional stakeholders at the same table. This provides the opportunity to think about all of the resources available. By talking with individuals from other channels, we’re able to be innovative to create solutions.”

JEROD MATHEWS

*Director of Dairy Supply Chain Partnerships, Feeding America
Attended the Evanston, Illinois Nourish Dialogue Dinner*

INTRODUCTION

“WHAT DOES FOOD MEAN TO YOU?”

That was the opening question at each of the 25 Nourish Dialogue Dinners hosted by National Dairy Council (NDC) and local dairy councils across the United States in 2018 and 2019.

For the Nourish Dialogue Dinner in the Crossroads Arts District in Kansas City, Missouri, stakeholders from across the food system gathered at Farina, where Michael Smith, the restaurant’s James Beard Award-winning executive chef, was first to answer the question. He explained that his range of experiences — from knowing food insecurity as a child to running fine dining kitchens in France early in his career — influence his feelings about food.

For example, Chef Smith talked about resourcefulness:

“At my restaurants, we don’t throw anything away in our kitchens unless we have to. If I could make something of strawberry stems, I would.”

That comment resonated with Alex Peterson, a dairy farmer who also was at Chef Smith’s table.

“Our farm has the same philosophy. We try to reuse everything we can because we can’t afford to waste anything. Efficiency of resources is paramount in reaching sustainability.”



A third-generation farmer who makes his livelihood 85 miles from Kansas City realized that he has something in common with an award-winning chef who works in an upscale, urban setting.

Illuminating moments like this are exactly what the Nourish Dialogue Dinners were about: bringing people from throughout the food system together to reveal how they are interconnected in their efforts to benefit both people and planet.

In describing their work — on the farm, at an academic institution, in a kitchen, professional practice, public health or educational program, company or organization — diverse stakeholders discovered they share common values, challenges, goals and solutions. They broke down barriers while breaking bread, listening and learning.

Those barriers exist due to the complex, multi-sector nature of food systems. While we regularly hear perspectives that the food system is broken and needs transformative change to ensure human and planetary health, the thoughtful discussions at these dinners uncovered a hopeful perspective — one seeing the potential for solutions that can lead to a flourishing future with healthy people living on a healthy planet.

The complex, multi-sector nature of food systems can make it challenging for stakeholders from diverse areas to view themselves as part of an interdependent system. Even when they are in the same local community, professionals from across the food supply chain may not interact, much less collaborate, to impact nutrition and health outcomes or inform their local sustainable food systems. Yet, the dinner participants, inclusive of practitioners and leaders representing various sectors of the food system, were able to come together for dinner and discussion about how to collaborate to advance sustainable food systems.



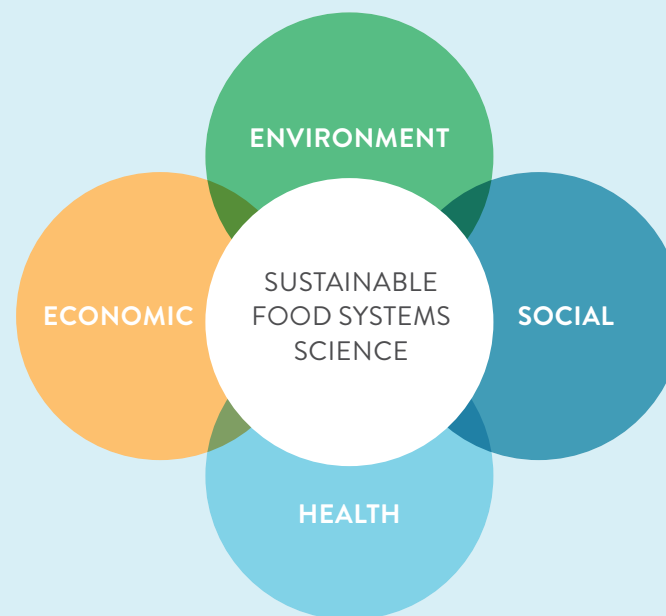
“There aren’t many places where you can have open conversations in a non-competitive space for the general good of everyone. We’re all thinking about the same beginning and end of food – where it comes from and where it ends up – and seeing the same issues. I would like to talk about what we can all do in the middle to make it better.”

AMY CARTER, MA, RDN, LD, CDCES
 Director of Outpatient Nutrition, Eskenazi Health
 Attended the Indiana Nourish Dialogue Dinner

Interaction is needed now more than ever. By 2050, there will be at least two billion more people on the planet and millions of people already face food insecurity and public health issues in the U.S. and around the globe. With our natural resources at risk, sustaining and improving human and planetary health will require collaboration, innovation and new systems thinking.

Environmental sustainability is core to healthy, sustainable food systems that will reflect a future where nutritious food is responsibly produced, people and the planet are healthy, and communities thrive. The four domains of sustainability (figure 1) reflect this vision. This vision is also central to the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (figure 2).

FIGURE 1
SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS ENCOMPASS FOUR DOMAINS



Environment

Impact of the food system operations on land, water, and energy use, at local and global levels

Social

Community food security, cultural identity and norms, cultural and religious influences on food choices, inclusive food distribution channels

Health

Quality, diversity, accessibility, affordability, taste, enjoyment and safety of the food supply; dietary patterns, nutrient adequacy, disease risk, population health

Economic

Food prices, food and social justice, fair wages for producers and laborers, profitability

-Drewnowski, A. *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 4, 74, 2017.

FIGURE 2

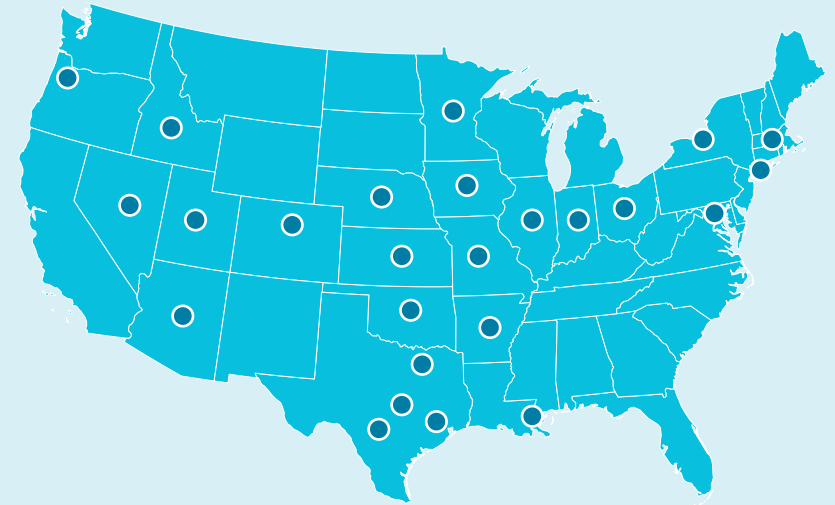
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>

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Quantitative analysis of notes from 21 of the dinners informed the insights and recommendations detailed in this report. That process also helped identify stakeholders whose work exemplifies some of the dinner learnings. Their stories bring to life the dynamic of the dinners — the passion, unique perspectives, shared ground and momentum around collaboration to create solutions.



NOURISH DIALOGUE DINNER STAKEHOLDERS REPRESENTED DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES FROM ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM:

FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

Farmers, Food Processors and Manufacturers, Agribusiness, Consumer Packaged Goods, Retailers

FOOD ENVIRONMENTS, FOOD ACCESS

School, Workplaces, Hunger Relief Organizations, Government, Non-government Organizations, Academia

CONSUMER EDUCATION

Physicians, Dietitians, Nurse Practitioners, Fitness Professionals, Culinary Experts

INSIGHTS & INSPIRATION

The Nourish Dialogue Dinners followed a consistent format, with the hosts asking pre-determined questions over the course of the evening to facilitate discussion. But each dinner had its own unique ambience, with conversations unfolding depending on experiences, perspectives and passions.

Despite unique points of view from stakeholders representing multiple sectors, there were many common areas of interest. Analysis of dinner conversation notes revealed that they discussed 19 areas of opportunity:



1. Create nutrition and farm programs for parents and children.
2. Recognize farmers for their environmental stewardship.
3. Share the real story of agriculture and farming.
4. Connect people to where their food comes from.
5. Share examples of farmers' commitment to animal care.
6. Provide more foods with higher nutritional value in food assistance programs.
7. Tell the real story about how nutrient-rich milk is responsibly produced so it is good for people and the planet.
8. Increase programs and practices that support access to healthy and sustainable food choices.
9. Honor the societal and cultural benefits of sustainable food systems.
10. Provide educational resources and programs to improve peoples' eating and behaviors.
11. Continue innovation in food assistance programs.
12. Keep up with current social media channels to reach consumers, especially college-age youth, with nutrition education.
13. Showcase retailers' distinct role in connecting people to where their food comes from and how it fits into sustainable food systems.
14. Encourage good nutrition for optimal health and to reduce risk of chronic disease.
15. Find novel ways to reduce food waste and recycle food.
16. Transform food systems with unique innovations at both the local and global level.
17. Engage diverse partners and stakeholders across the food system for greater collective impact.
18. Celebrate the unique contributions of all types of farms, including small-scale ones and the local food they produce.
19. Promote economic development and stability in food systems.

These areas of opportunity identified by participants can be grouped into three broad themes:

- *We have an accountability to educate and empower the next generation, so they have fact-based, positive perceptions about food and agriculture.*
- *We must continue developing innovative programs and practices that support healthy and sustainable food choices.*
- *We can have greater impact if we collaborate and proactively communicate our efforts to create innovative solutions to advance sustainable food systems.*

Three calls to action stem from these broad themes. They provide a roadmap for focusing future efforts to accelerate positive nutrition and health outcomes as part of improving sustainable food systems. Many stakeholders are already doing innovative work in these areas. We share some of their stories below in the following Calls to Action to provide inspiration and ideas for how we can move forward together.



CALL TO ACTION #1

Set the record straight: Develop creative approaches to improve food literacy so the next generation is empowered to make healthier, more sustainable food choices.

Meet Jennifer Heltzel



She is a small-scale dairy farmer who's passionate about connecting children to where food comes from and sharing how farmers take care of their animals and the planet.

As Jennifer Heltzel drove through traffic to the Nourish Dialogue Dinner in Brooklyn, New York, she noted the stark contrast from where she began her journey. Jennifer and her husband Andy operate Piney Mar Farm, a fourth-generation dairy farm in Martinsburg, Pennsylvania — population less than 1,800.

The view out her window was a reminder of how people in urban areas lack opportunities to connect with farming and agriculture. “If the city is all you know, then you have no idea what I do,” Jennifer said. “All I see out my window at home is grass. Bridging that gap is critical.”

Today’s youth also are easily influenced by advertising and social media, where misinformation abounds about farms and food. That is why Jennifer is passionate about showing where food comes from. “Farmers can help the next generation of consumers form a positive view of agriculture and make healthy, science-based food choices.”

For example, the Heltzels offer school tours of their farm, both live and virtual. “Live is ideal, of course, but the virtual tours enable us to reach more kids,” Jennifer said. “We can’t bring every child from New York City to our dairy farm, but we can take our farm equipment out and show it to them, and they can interact with a farmer, all without leaving the classroom.”

During the tours, the couple talks about how farming is a family endeavor that includes their four children. They also address the size of their farm, which has 140 cows. “By industry standards, we’re a small farm,” Jennifer said. “But kids, and even parents, see us as very big. They know what it takes to care for a few pets, so taking care of 100 cows sounds shocking.”

Jennifer is quick to point out that farms of all sizes take care of their animals. “We need to tell the story that size of a farm isn’t indicative of the care animals receive. Whether you have 30 or 3,000 cows, you generally have to follow the same quality standards. We all need to keep the animals healthy.”

She also stresses that on a farm, science is a good thing. “We need to do a better job showing what happened when we started using science and technology to take really good care of our cows — like build a specialized nursery barn or install a sophisticated cooling system. Some people think the past must be better than today, but we’re light years away from even 20 years ago. We farmers love the science of what we do.”

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Meet Lauren Twigge



She monitors social media conversations and trends to reach the public, especially college-age audiences, with nutrition education — including how dairy is part of healthy eating patterns and sustainable food systems.

As a dietitian just starting her career, Lauren Twigge, MCN, RDN, LD, brought a fresh perspective to the Nourish Dialogue Dinner in Dallas, Texas.

And with thousands of followers on Instagram, she is reaching a growing audience through social media; her handle is [@thedairydietitian](https://www.instagram.com/thedairydietitian).

For Lauren, who works in corporate wellness by day, it's a personal endeavor to show where food comes from, how it's made and how it nourishes the body. "I want to help slow the spread of fear around certain food groups."

Her strategy is "to be food positive." With humor and a light touch, she debunks common food myths, posts recipes and shares her firsthand knowledge of agriculture.

Lauren's passion stems from growing up on a dairy farm in California. In college, she planned to go on to veterinary school until she had an eye-opening realization: not everyone made dairy foods core to their diet.

"I had three roommates, all nursing majors, and I was the only one who drank cow's milk. It was surprising. I realized not everyone knows milk's nutritional value."

Soon after earning a bachelor's degree in animal science, Lauren changed course. Rather than go to veterinary school as planned, she pursued a master's in clinical nutrition.

Today she hopes to help "uncomplicate" food. "I want to show that food can be really simple — that unless you have a food allergy or certain medical conditions, you don't have to be afraid of a whole food group."

On Instagram, Lauren gets questions from followers, many of whom are college-age. "They have information at their fingertips, but they can't discern if what they read or hear is coming from a credible source. They're more swayed by a celebrity or peer than by a research study; Netflix documentaries carry more weight than a scientific article."

Many comment that they avoid dairy foods for environmental reasons. Lauren said, "I'm amazed because that's where dairy farmers thrive — where they're so resourceful and innovative."

To combat such misperceptions, Lauren strives to get more farmers' voices on social media, building goodwill and telling the real story about how they're stewards of the land.

"There's a big world out there that isn't connected to agriculture. Even if you just show everyday life on the farm, social media is a way to reach that world."

"I want to show that food can be really simple — that unless you have a food allergy or certain medical conditions, you don't have to be afraid of a whole food group."



Meet Diane Stadler



Since 2008 Diane has been the director of the Graduate Programs in Human Nutrition and Dietetic Internship Program at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU).

Diane attended the Washington, D.C., Nourish Dialogue Dinner. Since joining the faculty at OHSU, she has coordinated international experiences for nutrition graduate students and dietetic interns in Honduras and in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The focus of her work in Honduras was to provide training to community health workers to address high rates of maternal, infant and child malnutrition. One highlight of this partnership was helping community members establish school snack programs. “We learned about local foods, how to cook for an entire school over an open fire, and the value of collaboration to provide food for children who would otherwise go hungry.”

More recently, OHSU nutrition graduate students spent a month in Lao working on their thesis and capstone projects. Aloura Linfesty shared, “Had it not been for this opportunity, I would not have the confidence to travel abroad.” Esther Xu, invited her colleagues to visit her family in China. “I am honored for my friends to meet my family, to learn where I’m from and more about who I am.” Lauren Johnson who grew up on a farm commented on “how much we take food production, food distribution and food access for granted.” Zednia Linares shared that “treatment of chronic disease is challenging in the most resource-rich countries; these challenges are magnified in developing countries where access to health care, medications, and diversity of foods is limited. Can you imagine having diabetes in a country where rice typically comprises 60-80% of daily caloric intake?”

Reflecting on the statements, Diane knows that providing opportunities for students to experience different cultures both at home and abroad is critical. “I feel a responsibility to help our next generation of dietitians develop a global perspective and appreciation for how complex the roots of malnutrition are. As food and nutrition experts, we have so much to offer and we need to do so respectfully and with humility – to first listen and to try to understand.”



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Meet Kathleen Merrigan



To help prepare future decision-makers to drive food system transformation, Kathleen takes graduate students on an immersive tour of food production throughout Arizona.

Kathleen Merrigan, PhD, spent her career working at all levels of policy making. Most recently she served as deputy secretary and chief operating officer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) during the Obama administration (2009-2013). She created and led the department's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative" to support local food systems and was a key architect

of First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign. Kathleen attended the Tempe, Arizona Nourish Dialogue dinner.

Now Kathleen is teaching the next generation of business, nonprofit, academic and government food decision leaders. As the inaugural executive director of the Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University, she leads a new graduate certificate program for working professionals who are on track to be future food and agriculture leaders.

In addition to online and classroom learning, the course includes an immersive, one-week, 1,000-mile tour of agricultural production and food processing across Arizona. Kathleen plans all of the tour stops and accompanies the students on their trek. "They see cotton, citrus, cattle, dairy cows and more — farmers, ranchers and supply chain businesses. They get to ask questions and learn the value of engaging diverse partners and stakeholders across the food system."

One stop was Kerr Family Dairy. Kathleen met owner, Wes Kerr, at the Arizona Nourish Dialogue Dinner. After hearing about the tour, he invited her to bring her class to his 90-year-old farm, which is home to 2,300 dairy cows and 600 acres of feed crops. "We had a great experience," said Kathleen. "For some students, it was their first visit to a dairy farm, while others grew up milking. In all cases, they learned something new."

The tour days are long, but Kathleen said it's well worth the effort to have students meet people who are directly impacted by food and agriculture policies and programs. "It's difficult to provide fact-based information and guidance for decision-makers around food and agriculture without being on the ground having conversations with those who grow and raise our food."



CALL TO ACTION #2

Embrace comprehensive sustainability: Ensure that the four domains of food system sustainability – environment, health, economic and social – are addressed in the development and implementation of all food and nutrition programs and practices, locally and globally.

Meet Mitch Gruber



He is passionate about continuing innovation in food assistance programs and promoting economic development and stability in the food system.

Foodlink, the regional food bank in Rochester, New York, has been operating the Curbside Market since 2013. It is now one of the biggest mobile farmers' markets in the nation, providing a way for people in low-income communities to access fresh, local produce and stretch their grocery budgets.

Operating year-round, a fleet of Curbside Market vehicles visits dozens of sites per week, with affordable housing facilities, senior centers, health clinics, community centers, and more all serving as stopping points. In 2019, the market recorded more than 40,000 customer visits and sold more than \$275,000 in produce, including fruits and vegetables purchased with federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

"Thousands rely on us on a weekly basis to get their fresh and healthy food," said Mitch Gruber, Foodlink's chief strategy and partnerships officer. "Every year, our customers and transactions go up and so do our SNAP sales, so we know we're serving the population that it was meant to serve."

"I wish people could see that providing access is good for all – including farmers and manufacturers – because it gives people the ability to buy food."

Curbside Market has been so successful that Foodlink hopes in the future to open community-led "brick and mortar" grocery stores in and around Rochester. "There's a real opportunity to innovate how we do food retail. Retail is about access, so that food is convenient and affordable and leverages incentive programs. Right now, most food retail exists in affluent communities, not in poor ones."

For Mitch, who also sits on the Rochester City Council, food insecurity is a problem that demands more than short-term solutions. "The charitable solution role can only take us so far. Emergency food feeds someone month to month. When a crisis hits, it hits at the dinner table. We need to be better prepared to feed people in a time of need. But in underserved neighborhoods, chronic food insecurity goes beyond emergency – it's related directly to poverty. So, the larger conversation is about dollars and wealth."

Mitch attended the Nourish Dialogue Dinner in Geneva, New York. He would like a more diverse group of stakeholders to collaborate on food insecurity solutions at the local and national levels.

"I want to see more food procurement strategies that everyone is responsible for. Too often it feels like anti-hunger organizations and agricultural organizations are having separate conversations about the same subjects. I wish people could see that providing access is good for all – including farmers and manufacturers – because it gives people the ability to buy food. At all levels, we must find a way to think about food as a way to build health and equity."

Meet Louie Kazemier



On his family's third-generation dairy farm and through volunteering in his community and abroad, he integrates all four domains of sustainability: environment, health, economic and social.

At the Nourish Dialogue Dinner in Portland, Oregon, Louie Kazemier, co-owner of Rickreall Dairy in Rickreall, Oregon, told fellow guests: "I believe every dairy farmer wants to be sustainable."

He then explained how he adheres to strict guidelines for sustainability and is innovative in how he farms. For example, Louie upgraded his farm's lighting to reduce energy use by hundreds of thousands of kilowatts per year. He also is vigilant about soil health, waste management, water conservation and cow care. And he has an open-door policy for other farmers as part of his commitment to sharing his solutions with others.

Louie also is passionate about helping families and schoolchildren make the connection between good nutrition and agriculture. He hosts live tours of his farm, as well as virtual farm tours in partnership with Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council and Oregon Agriculture in the Classroom. Each virtual tour reaches an average of 15 classrooms and the videos are available on YouTube.

Louie also makes time to serve his community and his church. He built a camp in Oregon for families that have children with special needs. And every six months, he travels to a village in Uganda, where he has helped build a church, support an orphanage and medical center and start a small farm.

Rickreall Dairy marked its 30th anniversary in April 2020. The farm employs 26 employees, including two who have been there since the farm was founded. Louie takes pride in providing a livelihood for his family and employees. His son is now learning how to manage the farm.

Rather than mark the anniversary with a party, Rickreall Dairy said "thank you" to the community by hosting a food drive. Every car received ground beef donated by the dairy, milk donated by Darigold, the dairy's processor, and vegetables donated by Farmers and FFA Fighting Hunger in Oregon.

The effort provided food to 430 families. For Louie, it was the best, most sustainable kind of celebration. Louie wrote in a post on the dairy's Facebook page: "We love each and every one of you! So, pour a glass of milk and raise it up! Cheers, to the best little community in the world, and cheers to 30 years!!"



Meet Jennifer van de Ligt



She is teaching the next generation of food system leaders to think broadly, so they can transform food systems with unique innovations at both the local and global level.

As she leads a University of Minnesota graduate certificate course for early- to mid-career food system professionals, Jennifer van de Ligt, PhD, aims to inspire future problem-solving thinkers.

With her colleagues, she has designed a unique curriculum for the Integrated Food Systems Leadership program that draws on her equally unique background across many different sectors of the food system. Jennifer grew up in animal agriculture, then worked in animal feed and nutrition and, later, human food production and nutrition. Those varied experiences give her a perspective that has become critical for leaders in today's complex food system.

The hope is that her students gain the same broad view so they complete the program ready to collaborate across the food system, breaking boundaries to innovate and develop new approaches to a range of challenges — including global issues like climate change and supply chain disruption during crisis.

It's a mindset shift for many. Students often come to the course seeing the food system through a single lens. "We're training these emerging leaders to take their expertise in one area and think broadly in a systems approach," Jennifer said. "Whether they work at a large, multi-national or an entrepreneurial company — in product development, policy, regulation, marketing or sales — it is imperative that students understand they're part of a bigger system."

Jennifer is constantly looking to bring new lessons and viewpoints into the classroom. Attending the Nourish Dialogue Dinner in St. Paul, Minnesota opened even her experienced eyes and ears. "There were a lot of voices that made me stop and think."

For example, she sat beside Colleen Moriarty, executive director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota. Jennifer said, "It hit home for me that food security affects all of us in our local communities. We can promote not just food security but food justice. It's interesting because when I started the Integrated Food Systems Leadership program, none of our faculty were well versed in food security. So, the new perspective on food security gained at the dinner was invaluable. We added it to the coursework."

In doing so, she followed advice she gives to students: "Stop and take stock of where you work right now, what you know and what that impacts. Then you can look more holistically at the food system and how you interact with it, both upstream and downstream. A lot happens between farm and fork."

"We're training these emerging leaders to take their expertise in one area and think broadly in a systems approach."



CALL TO ACTION #3

Be solution-oriented: Partner with other stakeholders to create solutions and raise awareness about new, innovative ways to support sustainable food systems.

Meet Eric Halvorson



He is manager of corporate affairs for the central division at Kroger Company, the largest supermarket retailer in the country. Kroger has a bold plan to address food insecurity and reduce food waste.

In the new food future, we can strive to ensure food security for all and also eliminate nearly all food waste. That is the idea behind Zero Hunger, Zero Waste, a partnership between Kroger and Feeding America. The effort aims to end hunger in communities that Kroger serves and eliminate food waste across the company by 2025.

“It is a very ambitious plan, and we know we can’t do it alone,” said Eric, who attended the Indianapolis, Indiana Nourish Dialogue Dinner. “One in eight Americans struggles with hunger and nationwide, 40% of the food we produce gets thrown into landfills.”

As a founding partner of Feeding America, the nation’s largest hunger relief organization, Kroger has long-standing partnerships with food banks across the country. Since launching Zero Hunger, Zero Waste, Kroger has accelerated food donations in places the company calls home, aiming to achieve 3 billion meals by 2025.

Quantity is important and so is quality. Kroger also aims to donate more balanced meals. Store associates are empowered to identify donations — meat, produce, dairy and bakery items — that will remain safe, fresh and nutritious. In 2019, Kroger provided a total of 493 million meals — in food and funds — to its communities across the country, a 56% increase from 2018. Kroger surpassed its three-year goal to donate 1 billion meals by 2020, putting the retailer on track to achieve its goal of donating 3 billion meals by 2025.

Food donations also help on the food waste front, as do prevention and diversion efforts. “It’s a constant goal to reduce how much we throw away,” Eric said. “Although it’s cheaper to throw everything in a landfill, in the long run, there are significant sustainability benefits to donating and finding alternatives.”

Those alternatives include developing transparent reporting on food loss and waste, as well as working with companies to reuse waste by converting it into fertilizer or animal feed on local farms. “Human ‘hand-me-downs’ for animals are working wonders,” Eric said.

Kroger doesn’t expect to solve these problems alone. That’s why we established a \$1 million innovation fund. We are providing grants of \$25,000 to \$250,000 for new ideas addressing food waste prevention, food recovery and food waste recycling. With their help and that of our Kroger associates, we are also developing new long-term targets, already looking toward 2030. We’re striving for enhanced commitments to reduce greenhouse gases and shift to 100% recyclable, compostable or reusable Our Brands packaging by 2030. They’re ambitious goals, but also essential. For the sake of our families and the planet.

In all aspects of the program, Kroger is continually asking communities, partners and other stakeholders to help provide ideas, feedback and best practices. For example, Kroger works closely with longstanding partners like Feeding America and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to develop metrics to track progress.

“It takes partners to come together and address these issues,” Eric said. “The more we sit down and share ideas, the better chance we’ll come up with some sort of solution.”

Meet Peter Allison



He engages diverse partners and stakeholders across the food system for greater collective impact in efforts to support small-scale farms and local food.

As the executive director of Farm to Institution New England (FINE), Peter Allison, MA, oversees a six-state network of nonprofit, public and private entities that are working together to promote a robust farm-to-institution network in the region.

“New England has a vision to produce half of the food that our residents eat by 2060. We want to have institutions like schools, hospitals and colleges buy 30% from New England sources by 2030.”

Peter attended the Cambridge, Massachusetts Nourish Dialogue Dinner. Like the dinners, FINE is all about bringing diverse stakeholders together.

“We have a broad network of people interested in getting local food into institutions for different reasons. We’re the backbone — leaning in, connecting, providing new ideas, energizing and creating forums to share successes. We also do research and organize communities to come together around initiatives.”

One success happened when the food service contract for most of the University of Maine system — the state’s public universities — came up for renewal. Peter and his team created a collaboration of student groups, farmers, food advocates and a conservation organization. “We learned enough to create a request for proposal for a new contractor with a target of 20% of Maine food by 2020 and recommendations for keeping the contractor accountable.”

The university system did switch contractors, and today a full-time staff person makes sure they buy local food. Peter said collaboration was key: “It worked because the farmers came forward and said: ‘Yes, we can supply enough food.’ Then we got support from alumni and students. All these entities came together with really different objectives. It’s still considered a success.”

Today in its work with other institutions, FINE is making an effort to learn more about local producers, in order to better communicate the value of local sourcing. Also in the works is creating a numerical target for potential partners that considers more than just geography — including sustainability, animal care, fair labor issues and nutrition.

Peter said that in any partnership, success depends on everyone in the network feeling engaged. “It’s not just an accumulation of roles; that synergy, when people feel like they’re getting something good out of the partnership, creates momentum. In a robust network, no one entity would have been able to create the outcome by itself.”

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Meet Michael Folino



While working in food system management at large healthcare institutions, he has found novel ways to reuse food waste. He also works to encourage healthy eating habits for optimal health and to reduce risk of chronic disease.

At the Columbus, Ohio Nourish Dialogue Dinner, Michael Folino, MBA, RDN, LD, said he's learned that "little things" he does at home to be more sustainable can make a big difference if he scales them to become practices or programs where he works.

Take reusing coffee grounds, for example. Previously as the associate director of nutrition services at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, Michael and his colleagues started a campus-wide program to collect coffee grounds and other "pre-consumer food waste" for reuse.

The initiative began in July 2018, with the waste going to Innovative Organics in Columbus, which turned it into nutrient-rich compost. In 2019, the university made it possible to supply 100,000 pounds of compost to gardens throughout central Ohio.

In addition, post-consumer food waste was donated to local food banks, soup kitchens and emergency shelters — about 40,000 pounds of food each year, mostly from the main medical center campus. And, through a grant focused on cancer prevention, a mobile education kitchen was introduced, with medical center chefs and clinicians traveling through underserved areas to distribute food samples and do cooking demonstrations to educate residents and encourage healthy food choices.

In his new role as director of support services at Akron Children's Hospital, Michael is having success sharing health information with the public through local media partners. "We're doing a monthly spot featuring our dietitians on local news, and we're creating online content."

He added that he sees many opportunities for dietitians to play a bigger role in helping consumers connect where food comes from and eat healthier, especially by pairing them with farmers and others. For example, for a partnership with a local food bank, a dietitian working with a social worker could have greater impact helping people who have limited options for affordable, nutritious food. "I think there's a lot of room for exploration there," he said. "Anywhere there are people and food, there's a pathway to have impact."



"Anywhere there are people and food, there's a pathway to have impact."

BUILDING A MOVEMENT

Each Nourish Dialogue Dinner ended with palpable excitement and energy around what could come next — ideas, possibilities and interesting takeaways. In other words, a lot to digest and a lot to spark acceleration behind building a movement.

Like anything, improvement in all areas that make up sustainable food systems starts with commitment — prioritizing efforts to build relationships with diverse stakeholders in the food system by breaking down barriers and opening dialogue. Even smaller, continual steps can add up to collective action that causes significant change.

Below are some ideas inspired by our stakeholder stories. Some are steps you could act on by yourself; others are better suited to small group collaboration.

These actions can be taken in the short-term, near-term and long-term.



“We can do research, but if the new knowledge doesn’t get put to use, then it doesn’t help the way it could. Partnerships and collaboration are needed to translate research to practice and progress.”



CASEY HOY, PhD

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Short Term

- Review the areas represented by the Nourish Dialogue Dinner participants on page 4 and plan to connect with people in your community who work in those various roles across the food system. Consider who can help introduce you. Use LinkedIn to search for mutual connections.
- Go online to see how others use blog posts and social media to be “food positive.” Some examples: [New Mexican Milk Maid](#), [Dairy Carrie](#), [Dairy Girl Fitness](#) and [Mama Knows Nutrition](#).
- Subscribe to one publication, blog, podcast or e-newsletter that is outside your specialty in the food system — perhaps farming, nutrition, food security, or food system management. Build your “food system literacy” so you learn more about the “real story” around challenges and innovations in sectors outside your own.
- Sign up to volunteer at a local food bank or shelter that serves meals in underserved communities.

Near Term

- If you’re already on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram or Twitter, you can share your perspective on sustainable food systems. Don’t take your unique perspective for granted. Consider how you can share it with others and hone your voice.
- If you’re a farmer, work with other stakeholders to offer live or virtual tours of your operations. If you’re not a farmer, get a group together to attend a farm tour, either live or virtual.
- Identify gaps in your knowledge or programming. How can you fill those gaps? Brainstorm the kinds of people and organizations you can collaborate within your community and region. Place a priority on working with farmers or agricultural organizations, those addressing sustainability, food security, food justice, conservation and/or health disparities. How might you learn, engage and collaborate?
- Make a list of consumer brands that promote a message or mission that incorporates the four domains of sustainability and make a point to support those brands—and let them and your social networks know.
- Start composting at your workplace. Start small — perhaps with coffee grounds — and expand from there. Locate vendors in your community and then share what you learn with other local businesses/organizations.

Long Term

- Plan a live or virtual immersive tour of farming or food production in your state as a way to connect students and others to agriculture. Encourage students to share their experiences on their own social platforms or a university-hosted blog or platform. Visit Sustainability.asu.edu/food to read student blog posts for examples.
- Host a live or virtual gathering of local teachers and administrators to examine ways to connect children to agriculture through science, language arts, social studies, history and consumer education/economics. Offer yourself or an expert you’ve connected with as a speaker for classes and clubs.
- Identify and pitch three stories about local farmers or food system initiatives to influential media in your community, whether TV, radio, newspaper, blogs, podcasts, etc. If you’ve never worked with the media before, partner with someone who has.
- Survey restaurants in your community about what they do with food waste. Do the same with large institutions — contact food service directors. How can you work together to improve their sustainability efforts?
- Consider how you can foster a new generation of food system leaders through mentorship or by offering college internships and other experiences through your company or organization.

CONCLUSION

“Improving sustainable food systems to nourish 10 billion people by 2050 — while helping communities thrive and protecting our natural resources — is one of the most complex challenges of this century. The Nourish Dialogue Dinners are a step in the right direction. By uniting farmers with others who also work daily in food systems, we can unlock opportunities and solutions to produce nutritious foods that are good for people, communities and the planet.”

JEAN RAGALIE-CARR, RDN, LDN, FAND
President, National Dairy Council



National Dairy Council was inspired by the idea that bringing diverse stakeholders together for a casual dinner and discussion to deepen understanding, build relationships and create momentum could lead to greater impact.

We believed that by coming together, we would find more common ground than differences. This includes a shared vision of a world well-nourished, reflected by a future where nutritious foods are produced responsibly, where communities thrive and people are healthy and can meet their full potential. This is the essence of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals, which calls for all sectors of civil society to work together to achieve a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity.

The connections between agriculture, nutrient-rich food, health and sustainability are at the forefront of this desired food future, and we have a shared responsibility to contribute to and advance healthy sustainable food systems.

As we learned from taking time to deeply listen and learn from the Nourish Dialogue Dinner participants, progress can be made to achieve better health for people and the planet, with actions taken by practitioners and professionals individually and collaboratively across the food system.

The three calls to action highlighted in this report represent shared ideas and motivations:

Set the record straight:

Develop creative approaches to improve food literacy so the next generation is empowered to make healthier, more sustainable food choices.

Embrace comprehensive sustainability:

Ensure that the four domains of food system sustainability – environment, health, economic and social – are addressed in the development and implementation of all food and nutrition programs and practices, locally and globally.

Be solution-oriented:

Partner with other stakeholders to create solutions and raise awareness about new, innovative ways to support sustainable food systems.



Together these provide a roadmap for collaboration to help achieve a world well-nourished.

The Nourish Dialogue Dinner participants are making a difference, and you can, too. Whether you contribute to changes big or small, or somewhere in between, now is the time. Let's keep connecting, let's keep talking and let's keep acting. The future of human and planetary health depends on it.

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Since 1915, National Dairy Council (NDC) has been a non-profit organization founded by dairy farmers and funded through the national dairy checkoff program. NDC has been, and will continue to be, committed to providing science-based education about the nutrition and health benefits that dairy foods provide, while bringing to life hard-working dairy farmers' shared vision of a healthy, happy, sustainable world.

With more than 100 years of experience and a staff of registered dietitian nutritionists, nutrition scientists and communication experts, NDC works to provide practical information about how dairy contributes to health and sustainable food systems. This includes sharing the benefits of how eating three daily servings of low-fat and fat-free dairy foods like milk, cheese and yogurt can offer great taste, nutritional value and health benefits.



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