

Workshop 3

Defining Best Practices for Economic Development Assessment and Evaluation for Food System Initiatives

Description of topics to be covered

The topics to be covered include unique dimensions of food system developments and best practices. Information and guidance will revolve around a number of key issues and common empirical challenges such as: How to collect appropriate data, commonly accepted economic software programs, how to frame the study appropriately, how to interpret results from economic impact exercises and how common economic and regional science tools are being used and modified to effectively evaluate the sector.

Scope and novelty of the workshop

The scope of this workshop will be of interest and include current research in several key field areas: food systems, rural economic development, planning, and regional economic analysis. There will be academic, government (local, state and federal) and nonprofit studies and perspectives included in the presentations and discussions.

Workshop organizer(s) and their qualifications

Dawn Thilmany, PhD, Professor, Ag and Resource Economics and Food Systems Extension Team Co-leader, Colorado State University (CSU)

Dawn Thilmany McFadden is a Professor of Agribusiness and Agribusiness Extension Economist with Colorado State University. Dawn's research and extension includes over 70 peer-reviewed journal articles and over 300 Extension publications and presentations which focus on Sustainable Community Development, Specialty Crops and Food System Work teams. She also serves on the Markets Advisory Board and Farmers Market Working Group with the Colorado Department of Agriculture and served as the Interim Program leader for Organics with USDA-CSREES and was a Farm Foundation Fellow for Rural Community Vitality. She currently serves on the USDA on Research, Extension and Education Advisory Board and serves on a National Ag and Rural Development Policy Board.

Dr. Thilmany is the coordinator of the team, primarily drawn from the USDA Regional Research Group Community Health and Resilience. She will lead a group of 7 other economists and regional planners that will be the content presenters and toolkit developers.

Luanne Lohr, PhD, Associate Deputy Administrator, USDA AMS Transportation and Marketing Program

The USDA-AMS is the sponsor of this interdisciplinary, multi-state project intended to standardize the practices being used to evaluate and assess the food system projects that USDA supports through a variety of programs.

Rebecca Hill, PhD, CSU Extension Community Coordinator and Research Associate in Department of Ag and Resource Economics, CSU

Rebecca Hill works as a research associate in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Colorado State University. Dr. Hill's past research has focused on topics such as the value chain of Colorado Agriculture and the Contribution of agriculture to the Colorado economy.

Dr. Hill will organize and moderate the workshop and the research team of economists and regional planners. She will also take notes to record the discussions that arise from the workshop.

Format of workshop

The workshop will be half-a-day in length, with 1.5 hours of presentations and 3 hours of questions and answers, moderated discussion, and facilitated feedback.

Highlights

A team of USDA professionals who work with a variety of local food programming initiatives will kick off the day with a short panel describing how economic analysis and evaluation is essential to policy making, program priorities and evaluation of government sponsored projects throughout the US.

The subsequent set of presentations will demonstrate how a comprehensive, application-oriented toolkit of economic methods and analytical approaches can better guide those considering food system initiatives as part of a broader economic and community development planning process.

Since the toolkit will include best practices related to community process, data collection and compilation, customized analysis within commonly used software packages (IMPLAN) and examples of findings and outcomes used by different regions of the US to guide planning, it will provide a multi-disciplinary roadmap for this issue area.

Our expectation is that participants will include many who have been asked to participate in such programs in their local and regional areas, been uncertain of how to proceed given the overly diverse approaches currently documented in this field, and hoping to gain insight of how to engage in this topic in the future. For this reason, discussion and feedback should be fairly informative.

This workshop will also serve as a key milestone in the development of a standardized toolkit to be posted and promoted by the USDA AMS for future program and grant applicants. So, it has a very real and impactful contribution to the field.