SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE US FOOD SYSTEM

Dr. Cornelia Butler Flora
Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Agriculture and Sociology Iowa State University
Research Professor, Kansas State University
cflora@iastate.edu
Natural capital provides possibilities and limits to human action.

- Air
- Water
- Soil
- Biodiversity
- Landscape
Sustainable, healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits

- Human communities plan and act in concert with natural systems
- Ecosystems are used for multiple community benefits
- Those with alternative uses of the ecosystem seek common ground

Sustainable Agriculture movement
Cultural capital determines how we see the world, take for granted, value, and what things we think possible to change. Hegemony allows one social group to impose its symbols & reward system on other groups.
Local and traditional knowledge is appreciated and enhanced

- Cultural differences are recognized and valued.
- Mechanisms to maintain ancestral knowledge
- Communities are willing to take the time to understand and build on different ways of knowing and doing.
HUMAN CAPITAL

The characteristics and potentials of individuals that are determined by the intersection of nature (genetics) and nurture (determined by interactions & environment).

- education
- skills
- health
- self-efficacy

Anti-obesity
Increased use of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of local people

- Identify capacities
- Enhance capacities
- Recombine capacities
Social Capital

- mutual trust
- reciprocity
- groups
- collective identity
- sense of shared future
- working together

The interactions among individuals that occur with a degree of frequency and comfort. Bonding social capital consists of interactions within specific groups and bridging social capital consists of interactions among social groups.
Improved community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability

- Shared vision
- Building first on internal resources
- Looking for alternative ways to respond to constant changes
- Loss of the victim mentality
- Loss of cargo cult mentality

Social justice, economic security
Political capital is the ability of a group to integrate its norms into the standards, rules, regulations and their enforcement that influence distribution and control of resources.
Increased voice and influence

- People who share a vision for good food are organized and work together
- They know and feel comfortable around powerful people as well as those often excluded
- They make good food for all part of the political agenda
Forms of currency used to increase capacity of the unit that accesses it. Financial capital is often privileged because it is easy to measure, and there is a tendency to put other capitals into financial capital terms.

- savings
- debt capital
- investment capital
- tax revenue
- tax abatement
- grants
Appropriately diverse and healthy economies

- reduced poverty
- increased food system efficiency
- increased food system diversity
- increased assets of local households in the entire food web

Social justice, economic security
Built Capital

- Recreational facilities
- Buildings
- Water systems
- Machinery
- Roads
- Electronic communication

Smart growth

Human-constructed infrastructure used as tools for production of other capitals
Physical infrastructure that enhances other community capitals because

- It serves multiple users
- It can be locally maintained and improved
- It links local people together equitably
- It links local people, institutions and businesses to the outside

Community-based economies
Social movements related to good food

Good food

Sustainable Agriculture

Green Environmental

Smart growth

Community-based economies

Local

Affordable

Social justice, economic security

Fair Labor Movement

Behind the Brands

99%

Occupy Movement

Population

Fair

Affordable organic healthy

Humane farming

Climate change

Green

Healthy

Social movements related to good food
Key capital for maintaining the industrial agricultural system

- Political Capital
  - Professional lobbyists
  - Myth of feeding the world
  - Hyperbole of saving the family farm
Labor Relations or Centralization?
Structure of agriculture vs structure of the flow of industrial inputs?
Democracy as an most important social impact

- Social relationships
- Ability to discuss differences rather than label dissenters
- Requires transparency and accountability
Key elements of competing agricultural paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrial agriculture</th>
<th>Alternative Agriculture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Centralization</td>
<td>1. Decentralization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dependence</td>
<td>2. Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Competition</td>
<td>3. Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Domination of nature</td>
<td>4. Harmony with nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Specialization</td>
<td>5. Diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Industrial vs Alternative Agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Decentralization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• National, international production, processing and marketing</td>
<td>• More local/regional production, processing and marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concentrated populations, fewer farmers</td>
<td>• Disperses populations; more farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concentrated control of land, resources, and capital</td>
<td>• Dispersed control of land, resources and capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality family life as elements of competing agricultural paradigms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial agriculture</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as consumer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family’s status determined by what they buy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family health through medical care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Children’s achievements off the farm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Time is money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family as a place to go out from</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative agriculture</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as producer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family’s status determined by what they do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family health preventative practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Children’s achievements on the farm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Time is creative leisure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family as a place to go in to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>