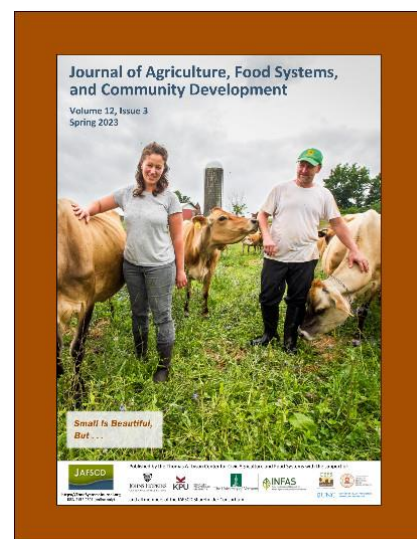


IN THIS ISSUE DUNCAN HILCHEY

Small is beautiful, but ...



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On the cover of our spring 2023 issue (volume 12, issue 3), Samantha and Chris Kemnah enjoy a moment with their cows on Clover Bliss Farm, their 190-acre farm in South Argyle, New York. You can read more about the Kemnahs in a 2018 article in the *Hill Country Observer* by Tracy Frisch entitled “An escape route from dairy farming’s crisis?”

Alas, the economic pressure Frisch referred to five years ago has remained for small dairy farmers—and particularly for small organic dairy farms. Since that article was written, the consumption of fluid milk has continued to decline even as organic milk has flooded into the limited market. In 2021, Danone North America (owner of the Horizon Milk brand) cancelled contracts with dozens of small organic dairy farms in the Northeast U.S., triggering an economic crisis and calling into question Danone’s certified B Corporation status. Observers have wondered, how could a company that promotes itself as farm-friendly not offer a more engaging and deliberative process in making such a consequential business decision?

But this case triggers an even larger question: while small may be beautiful, can small and middle-scale also be resilient, even in a triple bottom-line context?

Since E. F. Schumacher wrote *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973, Harper-Collins), small, local food production has been promoted as an antidote to the caustic industrialization of

On our cover: Samantha and Chris Kemnah enjoy a moment with their cows on Clover Bliss Farm, their 190-acre farm in South Argyle, New York.

Photo by Joan Lentini

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agriculture, which—following the “natural” evolution within a capitalist system—leads to the survival of just the fittest (the most economically efficient, regardless of the side effects).

So, just how fit is our alternative? Can it survive, let alone thrive? Can our food system research, policy, and practice lead to the groundswell of public support to make the sea change required? More specifically, is the expedited adoption of a hybrid Western/Indigenous food system the answer to our growing social and ecological challenges—and can we adapt it in time?

In this open call issue, our authors address these questions through the eyes of small and beginning farmers who are navigating a VUCA world—a world that simultaneously volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

We begin this issue with another thoughtful column by **John Ikerd**, who cautions us that “*Voting with your food dollars is not enough*.” He makes a very convincing argument that the collective “we” must go beyond the simplistic personal act of buying local and organic. We need to push hard on policies that hurt people and the environment, and to enact more resilient alternative in order to make a difference in a system that is so egregiously stacked against us.

In this issue’s open-call papers, JAFSCD scholars and collaborating practitioners give us a peek into the SWOTs of our intrepid small farmers and related food system initiatives. We get a glimpse into a wide range of challenges, but also of what we need to do to move the needle in this VUCA world—a world fraught with inequality, pandemics, environmental degradation, war, climate change, and other ongoing disasters.

We open our spring issue with *Diversification strategies for the resilience of small New England dairies*. Authors **Julie Snorek**, **Wyatt Cummings**, **Eric Hryniewicz**, **Keelia Stevens**, and **Rose Iannuzzi** explore how diversification may help small and family farms fare better during market shocks.

Next, **Keri Iles**, **Rebecca Nixon**, **Zhao Ma**, **Kevin Gibson**, and **Tamara Benjamin** find that beginning farmers are experiencing challenges such as labor shortages, difficulties in balancing on and off farm occupations, and establishing profitable marketing strategies, and that local resources organizations can do a better job of outreach and engagement to address these problems, in *The motivations, challenges and needs of small- and medium-scale beginning farmers in the midwestern United States*.

In their mixed-methods study, “*The farm has an insatiable appetite*”: *A food justice approach to understanding beginning farmer stress*, **Fiona C. Doherty**, **Rachel E. Tayse**, **Michelle L. Kaiser**, and **Smitha Rao** report high levels of mental health challenges among new, nontraditional farmers and what programmatic responses are critical to address these issues.

Sarah Rotz, **Adrianne Lickers Xavier**, and **Tabitha Robin** then explore the low level of Indigenous stakeholder engagement in the agri-food public sector, and citing “settler” lack of knowledge as a significant barrier to progress in fostering Indigenous food systems in “*It wasn’t built for us*”: *The possibility of Indigenous food sovereignty in settler colonial food bureaucracies*.

Continuing the exploration of small farms through an equity lens is *Surveying queer farmers: How heteropatriarchy affects farm viability and farmer wellbeing in U.S. agriculture* by **Michaela Hoffmeyer**, **Jaclyn Wypler**, and **Isaac Sohn Leslie**, in which the authors document systemic oppression in a population of queer farmers and identify strategies for addressing this complex issue, including support from LGBTQIA+ farm mentors or peers.

But small farmers are not the only stakeholders in our food system who are affected by our VUCA world. In *Experiences of structural violence and wage theft among immigrant workers in the California cannabis industry*, **Stella Beckman**, **Xóchitl Castañeda**, **Vania del Rivero**, **Anaisabel Chavez**, and **Marc B. Schenker** put the spotlight on a unique subset of our agricultural labor force who toil in an isolated and criminalized industry.

Potential solutions to our growing food system problems can come from nontraditional sources of wisdom. In *Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty: A collaborative conversation from the American Association of Geographers 2022 Annual Meeting*, **Suzanne Brant, Keith Williams, Jesse Andrews, Colleen Hammelman, and Charles Z. Levkoe** put a spotlight on the different knowledge ways of Indigenous and settler scholarship and identify the need for more respectful collaborations going forward in order to address all human and more-than-human needs.

Colleges and universities offer one of the best laboratories for food system study of course. In *Food systems change and the alternative campus foodscape* by **Michael Classens, Kaitlyn Adam, and Sophia Srebot** proffers the concept of the “campus food system alternatives” (CFSAs) that provides more clear governance, leadership, principles, and socio-ecological commitments than most current campus food systems.

Even schoolchildren can play a critical role in expanding family farming knowledge, as documented in *Assessing the impact of parental involvement on scaling agricultural technologies from school garden to home farm in Cambodia* by **Gracie Pekarcik, David Ader, Tom Gill, and Jennifer Richards**.

And the role of local market infrastructure in a VUCA world? In *COVID-19 and Pennsylvania farmers: Financial impacts, relief programs, and resiliency strategies during the 2020 growing season*, in which authors **Christopher D. Murakami, Miriam Seidel, Chia-Lin Tsai, and Jasmine D. Pope** discover the critical role direct markets play during a pandemic—to the benefit of not only farmers, but also local residents.

On the consumption side of the food system, we have two additional papers in this issue focusing on food insecurity in the COVID-19 era. In *Food insecurity among households with children during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic*, **Bailey Houghtaling, Lindsey Haynes-Maslow, Lauri Andress, Annie Hardison-Moody, Michelle Grocke-Dewey, Denise Holston, Megan M. Patton-Lopez, Nila Pradhananga, T. Elaine Prewitt, Justin D. Shanks, Eliza Webber, and Carmen Byker Shanks** develop a demographic profile using a five-state sample of households most likely to have experienced food insecurity.

Finally, **Cody Gusto, John M. Diaz, Laura A. Warner, Christine Overdevest, Catherine Campbell, and Sebastian Galindo** use a Delphi process with a sample of nutrition educator to find potential new strategies for incentivizing the use of SNAP benefits during a crisis in *A snapshot of nutrition incentive adaptation during COVID-19: Consensus-building with practitioners*.

To wrap up the issue we also offer three book reviews. **Emily Nink** reviews *Milked: How an American Crisis Brought Together Midwestern Dairy Farmers and Mexican Workers*, by Ruth Conniff. **Philip H. Howard** reviews *The Agricultural Dilemma: How Not to Feed the World*, by Glenn Davis Stone, and **Amos Strömberg** reviews *The Immaculate Conception of Data: Agribusiness, Activists, and Their Shared Politics of the Future*, by Kelly Bronson.

Thus, we come full circle in this issue. We began with how small farms are struggling and coping in a VUCA world and how researchers and practitioners can rally to support them. These articles give us a ray of hope. However, local, state, national, continental, or global food policy should take better advantage of important contributions that nonindustrial family farms of all scales make to resilient food systems, in both good times and bad. For example, farmers, local and regional food producers and distributors, farmers markets, home and community gardeners, congregate meal providers, and food banks and pantries can be incentivized to cluster into “circular food systems” that are coordinated and act in harmony, particularly in times of crisis. Furthermore, establishing “food system circuit breakers” that automatically trip when a municipality, region, or country experiences elevated food insecurity must be a priority. As John Ikerd reminds us, voting with your food dollars is not enough. The global food movement must rally to push an

applied research, policy, and practice agenda that leads to immediate actions and longer-term systems change—even if it's initially nominal and incremental.

It might sound cliché, but the clock is ticking, time really is running out, and there is much to do. Let's all put our shoulders to the wheel in whatever way we can.



Peace, health, and happiness to all,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Duncan Hilchey".

Duncan Hilchey

Publisher and editor in chief