

COMMENTARY

Assessing food systems funders' use of data and evidence to make funding decisions

Lesli Hoey,^{a *} Lilly Fink Shapiro,^b and
Catherine Diggs^c
University of Michigan

Duncan Hilchey^d
*Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and
Community Development*

Kim Hines^e
North American Food Systems Network

Fally Masambuka-Kanchewa^f
Iowa State University

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Abstract

Although academic journals are often considered to be reliable sources of evidence for informing practice, the extent to which funders turn to them to shape their decisions is unclear. We carried out a

survey to examine the types of evidence and knowledge that food systems funders use—and need—to make informed decisions, and to understand how research, particularly from journal publications, is or is not informing food systems investments. The majority of the 19 respondents worked for private foundations or community-based nonprofits that offer grants, loans, or other program-related investments to U.S.-based initia-

^{a *} *Corresponding author:* Lesli Hoey, PhD, Associate Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Michigan; Art and Architecture Building; 2000 Bonisteel Blvd.; Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA; lhoey@umich.edu

^b Lilly Fink Shapiro, MPH, Lead Evaluation Associate, University of Michigan; lshap@umich.edu

^c Catherine Diggs, BS, MURP and MS in Environmental Justice Student, University of Michigan; catdiggs@umich.edu

^d Duncan Hilchey, MRP, Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*; and Co-director, Thomas A. Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems; Ithaca, NY, USA; duncan@lysoncenter.org

^e Kim Hines, MA, Leadership Co-Chair, North American Food Systems Network; kim@foodsystemsnetwork.org

^f Fally Masambuka-Kanchewa, PhD, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Communication, Iowa State University, fallymk@iastate.edu

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Author Note

Portions of these findings were presented during the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (JAFSCD) Shareholder Consortium annual meeting, held via Zoom on March 8, 2023.

tives focused on local food, sustainable agriculture, and food access. Many respondents indicated that they draw primarily on local stakeholders and grantees to make funding decisions and do not prioritize scientific knowledge or externally derived evidence. For most, peer-reviewed academic journals, including the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (JAFSCD), are one of the last places they currently turn to for information that could shape their funding priorities. In other sections of the survey, however, respondents indicated that they value utilizing a blend of scientific research and local knowledge. Only four respondents require grantees or borrowers to carry out formal evaluations, and over a third of respondents are not satisfied with how their organization uses data and evidence to make decisions. They suggested a variety of ways that research could be made more accessible and relevant to them as funders and investors in the food systems arena. We suggest various ways that more comprehensive research could be conducted to study what drives the decision-making processes of the diverse U.S. food systems funding community.

Keywords

food systems funders, academic research, local knowledge, evidence-based philanthropy, private foundations, scientific data, community-based nonprofits

Introduction

The *Journal of Agriculture, Food Security, and Community Development* (JAFSCD) set out to be different from other journals when it was launched in 2010. In addition to switching in 2018 from a traditional subscription model to the world's first community-supported, open-access journal that focuses on applied research on food systems, it also solicited volunteer stakeholders to draft and share the JAFSCD Equity Agenda.¹ An underlying assumption

behind the JAFSCD Equity Agenda is that the research JAFSCD publishes will be read by and inform the work of key institutions that shape food systems.

We set out to determine if this assumption is true by focusing on one particularly influential set of institutions: food systems funders. As JAFSCD Shareholder Consortium members, staff, and authors, we were especially interested in understanding the extent to which JAFSCD and other food systems journals are a source of information that funders rely upon to shape their decisions. We were also interested more broadly in the types of evidence and knowledge that food systems funders use and need to make informed decisions, and to understand how research is or is not informing food systems investments.

Our questions were in part motivated by a session JAFSCD was invited to lead at the annual Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF) Forum in Kansas City, Missouri, in 2022, called “The Facts Do Matter: Using Evidence-Based Information in Funding Decisions.” SAFSF is made up of approximately 100 members who include a mix of “individual investors, regranteeing organizations, community foundations, [and] corporate and private foundations” (SAFSF, n.d.-a, para. 4), and the SAFSF Forum is “the only national gathering for and by funders supporting just and sustainable food systems change” (SAFSF, n.d.-b, para. 1).

Ensuring that food systems financing is catalyzing the alternative food movement² is more critical now than ever, given the increased mobilization around the climate crisis and the growing collective reckoning surrounding structural racism and associated food systems failures that the COVID-19 pandemic made even more apparent (Beer et al., 2021). We argue that systematic research on these types of food systems trends, as well as the emerging and long-standing responses

¹ JAFSCD's Equity Agenda states that the journal aims to “1. Amplify voices in the food system that are currently underrepresented in journal content; 2. Develop the capacity of university-based academics and others (e.g. research scientists and policymakers) to work as better allies and accomplices in social equity and food justice action, education, and research in and across the food system; and 3. To transform relevant JAFSCD and other institutional (e.g. USDA) practices and systems to be more equitable and just” (JAFSCD, 2019, Equity Agenda, para. 2).

² Galt (2017) defines the alternative food movement as “recent social movements made up of diverse activists, organizations, institutions, and enterprises aiming to create food systems that differ from industrial agriculture and the industrial food system” (p. 1).

being pursued by frontline organizations, should play a critical role in showcasing what, where, and how funders can most effectively support efforts to build more just, healing, and ecologically sustainable food systems. Examining where food systems funders are learning about what to fund, therefore, is in part a question about whether academic research is relevant to and is reaching funders.

Methods

We developed a survey largely designed around research related to “evidence-based philanthropy” (Easterling & Main, 2016; Greenhalgh & Montgomery, 2020). We received feedback on an early survey draft from a senior food systems foundation grant officer and SAFSF member. The 20-question survey asked about the respondent’s role in their organization, the type of funding offered, where and on what topics their organization focuses, the type of information and sources they rely upon to make decisions about what to fund, and how they evaluate impact (see Appendix A for the full survey).

Aside from several open-ended questions, most of the questions were closed-ended multiple choice or Likert scale questions, usually offering an “other” option where respondents could add their own answer or explain. The survey was first distributed during and after the annual SAFSF Forum held in Kansas City in late June 2022 via a QR code on table toppers. We also followed up with emails to SAFSF members and Forum attendees. In early September 2022, we promoted the survey again through an email list of 35 additional food systems funders developed with JAFSCD staff. In total, we received 19 completed surveys.

Findings³

Over half (53%; 10) of the respondents worked for private foundations and 21% (4) for community-based nonprofits. Two of those four respondents also worked for a regrantee organization and a Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI). An additional 11% (2) of respondents worked for corporate funds. The three remaining

respondents worked for a community foundation, a philanthropic advisory group, and an investment advisory firm. The majority (89%; 17) of the survey participants worked for organizations that provide grants; 26% (5) worked for organizations that also (or only) offer loans or program-related investments. Individual organizations indicated that their organizations also offer “revenue-based finance,” “equity and managing grants for the state,” and “investments in debt or equity.”

Respondents indicated that their organizations fund a broad array of work. Most common was the promotion of local food (26%; 5), sustainable (e.g., diversified, small-scale, organic, regenerative) agriculture (21%; 4), and increased access to healthy food (21%; 4) (see Appendix B, Question 5 for more detail). All organizations fund work located in the U.S., including 26% (5) in a single state; 26% (5) in 2 to 9 states; and 16% (3) in more than 10 states. One respondent noted that their organization concentrates most of its work in a single state but also “operates nationally.” A few organizations (21%; 4) work in the U.S. and internationally, and one organization works in two U.S. states and one city in Canada. The multiple roles respondents played in their organizations included project selection (74%; 14), grantee support (68%; 13), administrative roles (53%; 10), program evaluation (53%; 10), outreach and marketing (37%; 7), and fundraising (21%; 4).

Engagement with Food Systems Research Publications

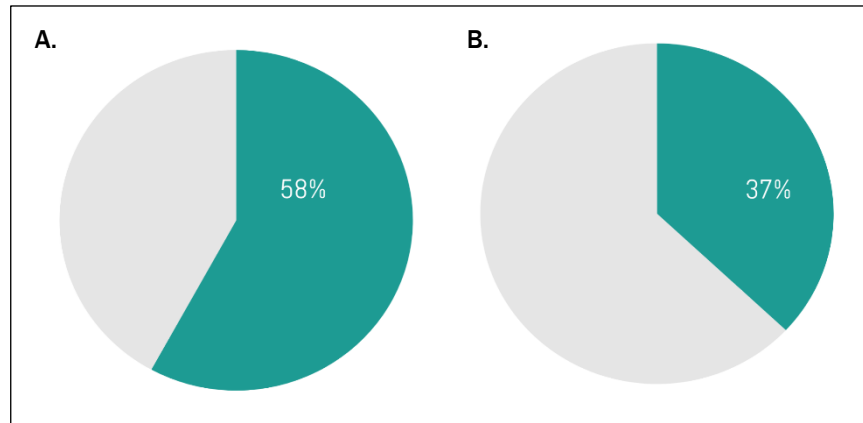
Nearly two thirds (63%; 12) of respondents indicated that they read research publications; the most common reason (58%; 11) is “to stay abreast of food systems trends that could shift their organizations’ funding priorities” (see Figure 1A). Over a third (37%; 7) of respondents, however, indicated that they do not read research publications (see Figure 1B).

Another reason that some respondents do read about research is “to provide existing grantees with the best available information to strengthen their capacity (e.g., to develop more evidence-based strategies, to improve how they evaluate their impact,

³ See Appendix B for additional figures and write-in answers for open-ended questions.

Figure 1.

- A. Over half (58%) of respondents read research publications “to stay abreast of food systems trends that could shift their organization’s funding priorities.”
B. Over a third (37%) of respondents do not read research publications.



etc.)” (16%; 3), or “to identify organizations or initiatives they might consider funding” (16%; 3). Two people read research publications “to learn about locations in the country where they might want to target their work,” or “to shape how they evaluate new proposals,” and one respondent added that they do so “to identify gaps in research that need to be filled (which we can fund), to better understand what is working and what is not.”

Only four respondents (21%) indicated that they read JAFSCD. Asked to name other food systems-focused research publications they draw on, two respondents listed *Civil Eats* and two said they read individual articles that are sent to them. Individuals also read articles or reports from Food Print, FERNs, Ag Insider, Grantmakers in Health, SAFSF, USDA, and “too many to list.”

Information that Influences Decisions

Only a quarter (25%; 5) of respondents were satisfied with the way their organization uses data and evidence⁴ to make decisions. Conversely, over a third (35%; 7) did not believe that their organizations use data and evidence to make decisions as effectively as they would like, while 40% (8) were unsure.

Many respondents indicated that they prefer a

blend of local knowledge and scientifically collected data or evaluation to decide what to fund. For instance, asked on a scale from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree,” participants agreed most strongly with the statement, “Local knowledge coupled with scientifically gathered information can be a powerful combination as long as they are from trusted sources” (average 4.5). Most also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Our organization believes that citing quantitative facts can

complement qualitative information such as testimonies or storytelling” (average 4.3).

On the other hand, other answers suggested that local knowledge is often relied upon more than scientific research. Many, for example, agreed with the statement, “Our organization relies heavily on a locally driven process for identifying problems and deciding what to fund” (average 4). Some also agreed but most were neutral about the statement, “Our organization relies heavily on evidence-based information and evaluation for identifying problems and deciding what to fund” (average 3.8). Relatedly, on a scale from “1 = never a concern” to “4 = always a concern,” the choice that drew the most “always a concern” answers was “Community-based organizations may resent the funder for not trusting the community and for honoring research more than local wisdom” (average 2.6). Five respondents were also concerned that “Because the program was developed elsewhere, local actors may not feel committed to implementing and sustaining it,” although 58% (11) were not or only sometimes concerned about this issue (average 2.4) (see Appendix B, Q.11 for more detail).

Similarly, nearly all respondents look to grantees or practitioners to gather ideas or evidence to

⁴ We did not define terms like “local knowledge,” “evidence” or “evidence-based,” letting respondents interpret the terms in their own way, although we usually said, “data and evidence” or “facts or evidence,” in combination.

determine if a particular topic is worth funding or if a strategy they want to fund is likely to be successful, including:

- Evidence provided by potential grantees in project proposals (95%; 18);
- Ideas we gather from people in the field, including emergent ideas (95%; 18);
- Feedback and ideas we gather from our stakeholders and/or current grantees (84%; 16); and
- Webinars presented by various food systems organizations (e.g., EFOD Partnership, Intertribal Agriculture Council, First Nations Development Inc, Indigenous Food & Agriculture Initiative, Funder Affinity Groups, Michigan State University's Center for Regional Food Systems, Wallace Center's Food Systems Leadership Network, the North American Food Systems Network) (79%; 15).

Fewer, but still over half, of the respondents also noted that they draw on:

- Secondary data sources (e.g., U.S. Census, USDA research, IFPRI research) (58%; 11);
- News outlets (e.g., *New York Times*, Al Jazeera, MSNBC, etc.) (58%; 11);
- Their own staff (53%; 10); and
- Newsletters and blogs of food systems organizations (e.g., Food Tank, Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance, FoodFirst!) (53%; 10).

Eight respondents (42%) also use "Internal research initiatives: national scans or other studies that our organization leads or commissions." The least used sources of information included "peer-reviewed academic journals" (32%; 6), "boards of directors" (21%; 4), and "listservs where researchers and practitioners debate or share the latest research (e.g., COMFOOD)" (21%; 4). One respondent in the open-ended section also wrote that "there is both an art and a science to this: by staying in contact with the field, one has the

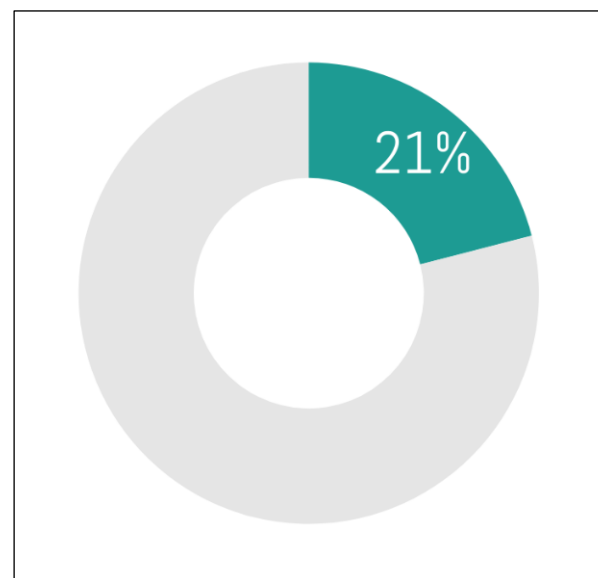
possibility to see emergent trends, and/or spaces where a funder could partner as a contributor."

Grantee⁵ Evaluation and Data-Sharing Requirements

More than three-quarters (79%; 15) of respondents indicated that their organizations "require progress updates or other reporting requirements, but no formal evaluation requirement" (see Figure 2). The four (21%) respondents from organizations that require formal evaluations noted that they prefer "qualitative data (e.g., case studies, interviews, focus groups, storytelling, etc.)" to measure community impacts, as opposed to quantitative data. One of these organizations requires the use of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) indicators. Two "do not require their grantees to use indicators of any kind (i.e., they can develop their own if they want to use indicators)" and one "requires their grantees to use other types of evaluation metrics." One respondent added in the open-ended section that they have grantees report

Figure 2. Only 21% of Respondents' Organizations Require Evaluation

All others indicated that they require progress updates or have other reporting requirements, but do not require formal evaluation.



⁵ We use the term "grantee," but respondents indicated that some of their organizations also offer loans.

“the outcomes they hope to achieve and to evaluate their progress reaching those outcomes post-grant period.”

Most respondents (79%; 15) encourage grantees to share their findings in “a project report, policy brief, or something similar.” Many (42%; 8) also encourage grantees to share findings through “presentations on webinars, conferences, or summits,” or via “discussions or other ways of sharing with peer networks, learning communities or communities of practice.” Over a third (37%; 7) post their grantees’ findings on their organization’s website, via their social media, and/or by asking their grantees to do so (32%; 6); 21% (4) encourage the sharing of information via “press releases or formal media outlets”; and two encourage the use of peer-reviewed journals or other published research outlets. Several indicated that reporting is context-specific or is left to the grantees’ preferences.

Data Needs

To support their decision-making, most referred to the need for easy-to-understand and more systems-based and policy-oriented findings. More than two-thirds of respondents, for instance, stated a desire for “research on systemic change strategies, including policy efforts” (68%; 13), “more publicly facing (i.e., easy to understand) summaries of academic research that explain the policy and practice implications” (63%; 12), and “case examples of what works and other research on good or promising practices” (53%; 10). Many were also interested in “research about emerging food systems innovations” (47%; 9), “up-to-date trends on new or emerging food systems issues” (42%; 8), and “more interdisciplinary research that demonstrates the interconnection between topics (e.g., health, environment, and economics)” (42%; 8) (see Appendix B; Q.18 for more detail).

Similarly, of the seven responses to an open-ended question about the “biggest research gaps related to their data needs,” two referred to the need for “measurable” and “concise” data, and two wanted clearer explanations of the policy implications of research or “tools to pull out what is needed in a concise way,” citing their lack of capacity: “We have a small staff and a lot of work

so this often isn’t done to the level we would like.” Individual respondents listed specific data they need, such as “research related to what we know from farms anecdotally,” “race and ethnicity data,” and “system change indicators and metrics that are relevant to community change.”

Finally, eight people responded to another open-ended question about how researchers or evaluators could better support more informed decisions about new initiatives to fund and/or to support current grantees. Three called for improved communication on the part of researchers and evaluators, or, as one person put it, “de-jargoning impact analysis frameworks and tools.” Respondents noted that better data were needed on topics that are underfunded, such as the relationship between “economic and environmental security and racial equity,” “farm animal welfare and healthy food,” and “how to build a robust climate-forward and resilient food system.” One respondent also suggested that researchers could support better decision-making structures, such as “volunteer panels” who can offer input in their decisions. Finally, one person called on researchers, “in general, to help funders move from counting widgets to looking at system change—and the need for long term sustained support to facilitate change.”

Discussion

These findings suggest that different types of funders, or perhaps funding organizations themselves, may have conflicting practices around their use of data and evidence to make funding decisions. On the one hand, many indicated that they draw primarily on local stakeholders and grantees to make funding decisions, do not prioritize scientific knowledge or externally derived evidence, and do not impose externally developed programs. For most, peer-reviewed academic journals, including JAFSCD, are one of the last places they currently turn to for information that could shape their funding priorities. They noted that they prioritize local and grantee knowledge over scientific research, in part, because they worry that their grantees “may resent the funder for not trusting the community and for honoring research more than local wisdom.”

In other sections of the survey, however, respondents indicated that they value utilizing a blend of scientific research and local knowledge, as well as quantitative and qualitative data, to guide their decisions. Nevertheless, only 21% (4) of respondents indicated that their organizations require grantees or borrowers to carry out formal evaluations. This, and the fact that over a third of respondents are not satisfied (and 40% unsure) about how their organization uses data and evidence to make decisions, also suggest that they might find more actionable evaluations useful, as well as more accessible and relevant research. As some indicated, what would be especially welcome is easy-to-understand summaries of academic research demonstrating clear policy implications or outlining systemic change strategies.

The ambivalence or contradictory responses found in our survey may be due in part to the academic publication process, which can often be too slow to inform urgent decision-making (Christie et al., 2021). This means that community-based groups may offer insights about innovations and emerging trends that funders are learning from and funding, long before academic research on the same topics may come to exist (or be published). Or perhaps the issue is not having sufficient “boundary spanners” who create a bridge between academic institutions and funding agencies (Tseng et al., 2022). These boundary spanners play a key role in implementing “relational” rather than “linear” approaches to disseminating research findings to ensure that research meets “the needs and contexts of its would-be users,” to more directly affect policy and funding decisions as well as practice (Tseng et al., 2022, p. 2). Relational approaches to research dissemination do not assume that findings are inherently useful and simply need to be communicated. Instead, they assume that research, from conception, must actively respond to the needs of decision-makers (Tseng et al., 2022).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Our survey results raise more questions than answers and should be seen as a starting point for further conversation and research about what

drives the decision-making processes of food systems funders, rather than a conclusive or representative perspective of the large and diverse U.S. food systems funding community. Several changes to the approach we took with this exploratory study would offer a more complete picture of the food systems funding landscape.

First, future iterations of a food systems funders survey should aim to secure more responses to increase the statistical significance of the survey findings. Crosstab data, discriminant and cluster analysis, and other forms of comparison would enable the creation of a typology of funders based on their use of evidence-based information. Private foundations, for instance, seemed over-represented in our sample, compared to nonprofits that engage in regranteeing or CDFIs. The response rate might increase if future invitations are personalized or if surveys are conducted in person at already occurring food systems conferences or summits, like a future SAFSF Forum.

Second, future surveys should collect the names of the organizations that respondents work for, even if they are kept confidential when reporting findings. We designed this survey to be anonymous to elicit honest responses—by asking for neither the name of the respondent nor their organization—but this prevented us from determining with certainty whether more than one person per organization took the survey. We have reason to believe, however, that at least 16 of the 19 respondents were from different organizations, since the information provided (e.g., type of organization, type of funding offered, geographic scope, and type of initiatives funded) was very similar for only three pairs of organizations. Still, knowing for certain whether some respondents were from the same organization would have prompted us to analyze those responses differently, such as determining if there are divergent views within a single organization, depending on staff roles.

Third, a more robust understanding of food systems funding would also emerge if a survey such as ours were accompanied by in-depth interviews. When we presented these initial findings at a JAFSCD Shareholder Consortium meeting, for instance, Consortium members suggested that we could ask about varying interpretations of “evi-

dence” that may not have been captured by our closed-ended questions. Additionally, they suggested that more open-ended questions would be useful on a range of topics, including the processes organizations use to develop calls for proposals, how they may be influenced by other funders, how they define “success,” and how committed (and in what manner) the food systems funding community is to addressing issues related to decolonization, white supremacy, structural racism, and the climate crisis.

Finally, another set of interviews and/or a different survey that would be useful to carry out would focus on the diverse mix of food systems

organizations that rely on food systems funding, particularly those who center sustainable and just food systems transitions. Comparing their views with those of funders would reveal where there might be divergent views about the forms and sources of evidence and knowledge that should be valued in funding decisions and how food systems funding processes themselves could be democratized. As was expressed in “an open letter from BIPOC leaders in food and agriculture to food systems funders,” supporting a just food systems transition also requires “more just ways of giving” (HEAL Food Alliance, 2020).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Survey Instrument as Created and Conducted Using Qualtrics



Sponsored by the [Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development](https://foodsystemsjournal.org) (JAFSCD), this survey is designed to identify the data needs and types of evidence that food systems funders and philanthropy professionals use to make informed decisions. The results will be published as an open access commentary in JAFSCD and/or submitted for a peer-reviewed article. Our goal is to inform food systems researchers about ways their work can be adjusted to improve the targeting of funding resources, reduce redundancy, and increase the overall impact of funder investments.

Your answers will be anonymous. Results will be aggregated, and no identifiable information will be used about you or your organization. Your answers will only be accessible to the JAFSCD staff and two researchers analyzing the survey (Dr. Fally Masambuka-Kanchewa, Iowa State University, and Dr. Lesli Hoey, University of Michigan). Your participation in this survey is voluntary—you may decline to participate and stop completing the survey at any point. Your completion of the survey indicates your consent to participate. If you have questions, please contact Fally (fallymk@iastate.edu) or Lesli (lhoey@umich.edu).

Thank you for completing this survey! It should only take you 10 minutes to complete.

1. What type of organization are you a part of? Select all that apply.
 - Community based non profit
 - Academic Institution
 - Private foundation
 - Donor Advised Fund
 - Community Foundation
 - Corporate fund
 - Charitable Trust
 - Regranting Organization
 - Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI, credit union)
 - Philanthropic Advisory Group
 - Investment Advisory Group
 - Other: _____
2. Does your organization offer funding of some kind (whether loans, grants, etc.)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Other _____
3. What type of funding does your organization offer? Select all that apply.
 - Grants
 - Loans
 - Program related investments (PRIs)
 - Other _____

4. Where does your organization operate?
 - The U.S. and internationally
 - The U.S. only—in more than 10 states
 - The U.S. only—in 2 to 9 states
 - The U.S. only—a single state or location within a state
 - Other _____
5. What type of food and farming work does your organization tend to fund? [Open ended]
6. What types of activities are you personally engaged in within your funding organization? Select all that apply.
 - Administration
 - Project selection
 - Grantee support
 - Program evaluation
 - Outreach and marketing
 - Other _____
7. Do you read the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development (JAFSCD)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Unsure
8. What other food systems-focused research publication(s) do you read? [Open ended]
9. Why do you read research publications? Select all that apply.
 - To stay abreast of food systems trends that could shift our organization's funding priorities
 - To design more informed calls for proposals
 - To shape how we evaluate new proposals
 - To provide existing grantees with the best available information to strengthen their capacity (e.g., to develop more evidence-based strategies, to improve how they evaluate their impact, etc.)
 - To identify organizations or initiatives we might want to consider funding
 - To learn about locations in the country where we might want to target our work
 - I do not read research publications
 - Other _____

The next questions focus on the type of information that influences how you and your organization decide what to fund and how you keep track of the impact of your funding

10. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

- Our organization relies heavily on a locally driven process for identifying problems and deciding what to fund.
- Our organization relies heavily on evidence based information and evaluation for identifying problems and deciding what to fund.
- Our organization believes that citing quantitative facts can complement qualitative information such as testimonies or storytelling.
- Local knowledge coupled with scientifically gathered information can be a powerful combination as long as it is from trusted sources.

11. Indicate the degree to which each of these concerns guides your organization's decision about engaging in evidence-based philanthropy.

1 = never a concern, 2 = sometimes a concern, 3 = often a concern, 4 = always a concern

- Local organizations may choose to adopt programs that have evidence but that are inappropriate to the local context (e.g., required resources not available).
 - Funders can incentivize the adoption of a certain program model or strategy, but can't control fidelity of implementation.
 - Because the program was developed elsewhere, local actors may not feel committed to implementing and sustaining it.
 - Community-based organizations may resent the funder for not trusting the community and for honoring research more than local wisdom.
12. Does your organization use data and evidence to make decisions as effectively as you would like?
- No
 - Unsure
 - Yes
 - Does not apply
13. Where do you look for specific facts or evidence that a particular topic is worth funding or that a particular strategy will work? Select all that apply.
- Internal research initiatives: national scans or other studies that our organization leads or commissions
 - The evidence provided by potential grantees in project proposals
 - Feedback and ideas we gather from our stakeholders and/or current grantees
 - Feedback and ideas we gather from people in the field, including emergent ideas
 - Our board of directors
 - Our staff
 - Secondary data sources (e.g., the U.S. Census, USDA research, IFPRI research)
 - Peer-reviewed academic journals (e.g., journals like JAFSCD, Agriculture and Human Values, Food Policy, etc.)
 - News outlets (e.g., New York Times, Al Jazeera, MSNBC, etc.)
 - Listservs where researchers and practitioners debate or share the latest research (e.g., COMFOOD)
 - Webinars presented by various food systems organizations (e.g., EFOD Partnership, Intertribal Agriculture Council, First Nations Development, Indigenous Food & Agriculture Initiative, Funder Affinity Groups, Michigan State University's Center for Regional Food Systems, Wallace Center's Food Systems Leadership Network, North American Food Systems Network)
 - Newsletters and blogs of food systems organizations (e.g., Food Tank, Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance, FoodFirst!)
 - Social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube)
 - Other sources: _____
14. Do you require your grantees or borrowers to do evaluations of the work you fund?
- Yes, we require evaluations [skip pattern by going straight to question 15]
 - No, we have progress updates or other reporting requirements, but no formal evaluation requirement [skip pattern by going straight to question 17]
 - No, we have no reporting requirements once a grantee receives a grant or borrower receives a loan [skip pattern by going straight to question 17]
15. Do you require your grantees or borrowers to use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) indicators for progress or accomplishment?
- Yes
 - No, we do not require our grantees to use indicators of any kind (i.e., they can develop their own if they want to use indicators)
 - No, we require our grantees to use other types of evaluation metrics. Please explain: _____

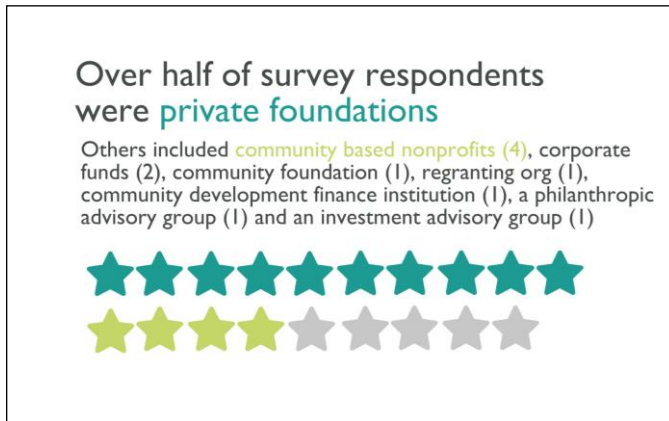
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16. What kind of data do you prefer that grantees or borrowers (and their evaluators) use to measure community impacts? Select all that apply.
- Qualitative (e.g., case studies, interviews, focus groups, storytelling, etc.)
 - Quantitative data (e.g., surveys, participation rates, etc.)
 - Other _____
17. How do you encourage your grantees or borrowers to share their findings? Select all that apply.
- A project report, policy brief, or something similar
 - Discussions or other ways of sharing with peer networks, learning communities or communities of practice
 - In peer-reviewed journals or published research outlets
 - On our organization's website
 - On the grantee's website
 - Through presentations on webinars, conferences, or summits
 - Via press releases or formal media outlets
 - Via social media
 - Other _____
18. Which of the following data needs does your organization have? Select all that apply.
- Up-to-date trends on new or emerging food systems issues
 - Research about emerging food systems innovations
 - Research on systemic change strategies, including policy efforts
 - National data on key food systems topics related to our work
 - Case examples of what works and other research on good or promising practices
 - More publicly accessible datasets (e.g., we know data exists, but it's not being readily shared or it's hard to access or find)
 - More interdisciplinary research that demonstrates the interconnection between topics (e.g., health, environment, and economics)
 - Systematic reviews to synthesize large volumes of research
 - More publicly facing (i.e., easy to understand) summaries of academic research that explain the policy and practice implications
 - More relevant information on topics related to the specific work we do
 - More timely information that is aligned with decisions we need to make
 - Disaggregated data specific to a city, rural community or neighborhood where we work
 - Better measurement tools (e.g., methods, indicators or metrics) our grantees can use to collect more accurate data about their impact
 - Detailed, retrospective analysis of our failed projects
 - More staff in our organization with training in evaluation
 - More resources so that we can carry out or commission research specific to our needs
 - Access to professional advisors and networks of scholars to tap into for advice on the most up-to-date, relevant, and high-quality data we could use
 - Other _____
19. What do you see as the biggest research gaps related to your data needs? [Open ended]
20. How could researchers or evaluators better support your efforts to make more informed decisions about new initiatives to fund and/or to support your current grantees? [Open ended]
21. If you would like to receive JAFSCD's Article Heads-up press releases, please enter your email address using this [LINK] (this outside form will de-link your survey answers from your email address).

THANK YOU for completing this survey! We look forward to sharing the results with the SAFSF network. If you have questions or additional comments, please contact the survey designers, Dr. Fally Masambuka-Kanchewa, Iowa State University (fallymk@iastate.edu) or Dr. Lesli Hoey, University of Michigan (lhoey@umich.edu).

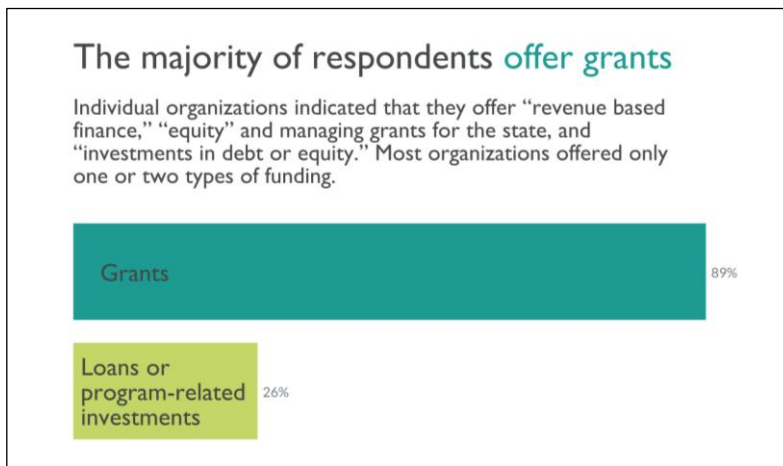
Appendix B. Additional Survey Figures and Responses to Open-Ended Questions 5, 11, and 18

The following figures offer a visual display of most survey responses described in the narrative of the report. Also provided in this appendix are the complete set of responses for questions 5, 11, and 18.

Q. 2. Does your organization offer funding of some kind (whether loans, grants, etc.)?



Q. 3. What type of funding does your organization offer? Select all that apply.

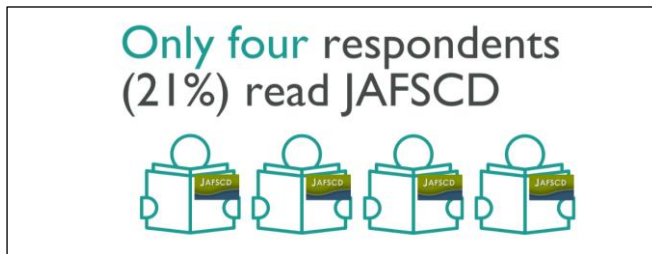


Q. 5. What type of food and farming work does your organization tend to fund? [Open ended]

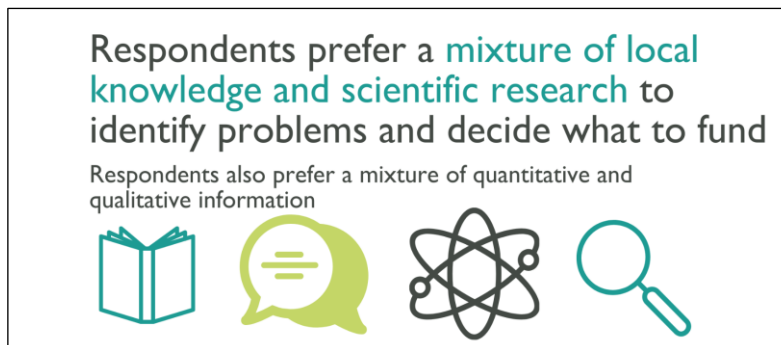
- The promotion of local food (26%; 5)
- Sustainable (i.e., diversified, small-scale, organic, regenerative) agriculture (21%; 4)
- Increased access to healthy food (21%; 4)
- "Equitable and sustainable/resilient food systems" (10%; 2)
- "Protection of agricultural land" (10%; 2)
- "Food as medicine" (10%, 2)
- Building capacity for small growers to engage with new markets (1)
- Assistance to new/small farmers (1)
- Farming on under-utilized land (1)
- Promoting values aligned procurement practices and policies (1)

- Support for entrepreneurs and food businesses by increasing access to capital (1)
- Humane animal agriculture (1)
- Strategies to transform food systems via local, state and tribal policy (1)
- Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) and schools (1)
- Mobile markets (1)
- Urban agriculture and urban food systems (1)
- Food sovereignty (1)
- On-farm research (1)

Q. 7. Do you read the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (JAFSCD)?



Q. 10. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



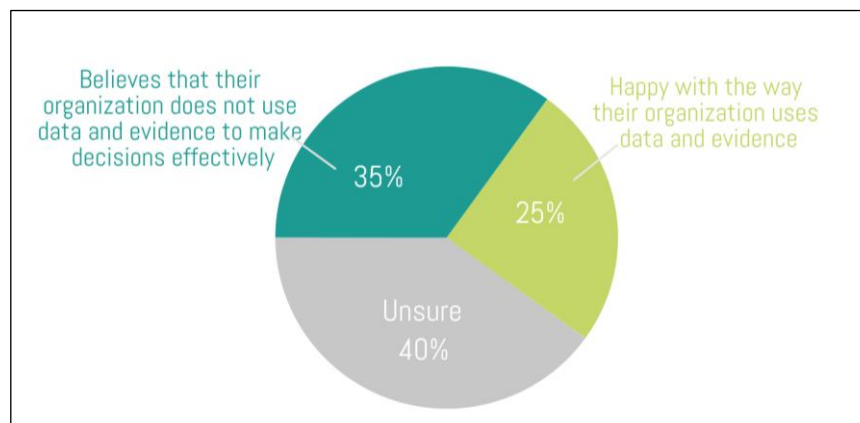
Q. 11. Indicate the degree to which each of these concerns guides your organization's decision about engaging in evidence-based philanthropy

1 = never a concern, 2 = sometimes a concern, 3 = often a concern, 4 = always a concern

- Community-based organizations may resent the funder for not trusting the community and for honoring research more than local wisdom. **(average 2.6)**
- Because the program was developed elsewhere, local actors may not feel committed to implementing and sustaining it. **(average 2.4)**
- Local organizations may choose to adopt programs that have evidence but that are inappropriate to the local context (e.g., required resources not available). **(average 2.2)**
- Funders can incentivize the adoption of a certain program model or strategy, but can't control fidelity of implementation. **(average 2.1)**



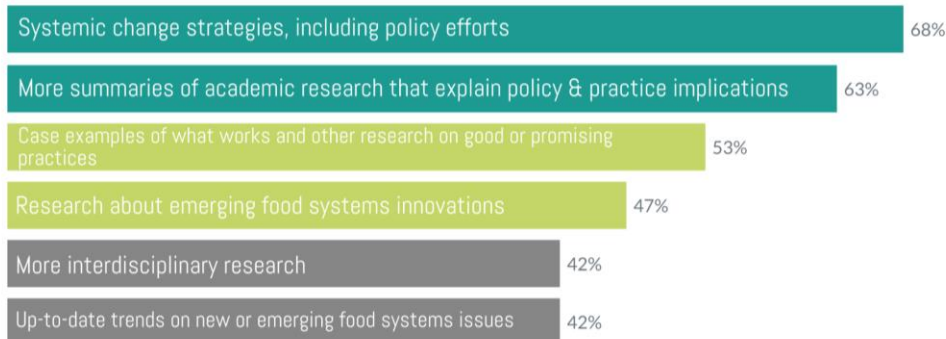
Q. 12. Does your organization use data and evidence to make decisions as effectively as you would like?



Q. 18. Which of the following data needs does your organization have? Select all that apply.

- Research on systemic change strategies, including policy efforts **(68%; 13)**
- More publicly facing (i.e., easy to understand) summaries of academic research that explain the policy and practice implications **(63%; 12)**
- Case examples of what works and other research on good or promising practices **(53%; 10)**
- Research about emerging food systems innovations **(47%; 9)**
- Up-to-date trends on new or emerging food systems issues **(42%; 8)**
- More interdisciplinary research that demonstrates the interconnection between topics (e.g., health, environment, and economics) **(42%; 8)**
- National data on key food systems topics related to our work **(37%; 7)**
- More relevant information on topics related to the specific work we do **(32%; 6)**
- Disaggregated data specific to a city, rural community or neighborhood where we work **(26%; 5)**
- More publicly accessible datasets (e.g., we know data exists, but it's not being readily shared or it's hard to access or find) **(21%; 4)**
- Better measurement tools our grantees can use to collect more accurate data about their impact **(21%; 4)**
- More resources so that we can carry out or commission research specific to our needs **(21%; 4)**
- Systematic reviews to synthesize large volumes of research **(16%; 3)**
- More staff in our organization with training in evaluation **(16%; 3)**
- Access to professional advisors and networks of scholars to tap into for advice on the most up-to-date, relevant, and high-quality data we could use **(11%, 2)**
- More timely information that is aligned with decisions we need to make **(11%; 2)**
- Detailed, retrospective analysis of our failed projects **(11%; 2)**
- Other _____ **(0)**

Respondents indicated that they would find systems-based research and summaries of academic research that explains the policy or practical implications most useful



Other responses included "More relevant information on topics related to the specific work we do," Disaggregated data specific to a city, rural community or neighborhood where we work and more