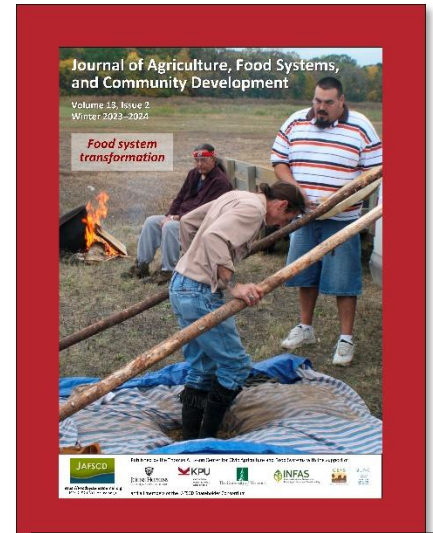


**IN THIS ISSUE**  
**DUNCAN HILCHEY**

## Transformative action in food systems



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On March 6, 2024, JAFSCD conducted its sixth annual general meeting of members of the JAFSCD Shareholder Consortium, which includes shareholders who support JAFSCD as an open-access journal through annual contributions. The theme of this year’s meeting was how JAFSCD could become a more transformative journal—that is, a journal that effectively rallies scholars, activists, and change agents to collaboratively build bridges to a better food system, locally and globally. JAFSCD takes its cues on this critical subject from its fiscal sponsor, the Center for Transformative Action, a nonprofit affiliate of Cornell University. Its profound theory of change includes the following passage:

*Transformative Action calls for courage to break the silence that surrounds ... injustices; patience and compassion to build an inclusive movement for systemic change; imagination to stay free from “us vs. them” strategies; and inspiration to envision new solutions to common challenges.*

—Center for Transformative Action (n.d., “Theory of Change,” para. 3)

To that end, we asked, “how can JAFSCD become a vehicle for transformation in the food movement?” To help us answer this question, we asked Professor Christine M. Porter (University of Wyoming) to give meeting participants a brief presentation entitled “Triple-rigorous research for truth and transformation,”

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*On our cover:* Members of White Earth Nation (Anishinaabe) prepare freshly harvested wild rice—manoomin—for a traditional meal of ground bison and wild rice with fry bread. The rice is winnowed, danced on with chanting accompaniment, and parched in a large cast-iron pot before cooking. This ritualized process has been cherished for millennia.

*Photo taken in 2007 by Duncan Hilchey*

which is her argument for doing research that is epistemologically, ethically, and emotionally rigorous. Her inspiring presentation can be viewed on JAFSCD's YouTube channel.<sup>1</sup>

In turn, Christine's approach set the stage for breakout groups that drilled down into three specific strategies supported by our shareholders in a recent survey:

1. Increasing outreach and engagement with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities in the U.S.
2. Offering an editorial fellowship each year to foster emerging leadership among historically excluded groups.
3. Placing more emphasis on researcher-stakeholder partnerships that lead to the co-creation of research.

The support for and feedback on these three transformative strategies we received during the meeting will help guide the journal's plan of work over 2024 and into 2025. This will be challenging, since JAFSCD has limited resources and bandwidth. But if it were easy, it probably wouldn't be transformative!

As usual, we begin this issue with The Economic Pamphleteer column, *Perspectives on the past and future of agriculture*. **John Ikerd** describes his own take on transformation over time, including the changes in the food system during his lifetime, from one of diverse scope and scale to one dominated by industrial agribusiness. Putting sentiment aside, he does not see a return to millions of farms in the United States—but he does believe we need to see a significant increase in the number of middle-scale farm operations stewarding the land. Ikerd envisions a “post-industrial” agriculture that is ecologically sound, socially responsible, economically viable. He argues that hasty “transformational change” is required, including expanding the use of existing practical preindustrial era knowledge, rigorous enforcement of antitrust laws, and establishing a thinktank that can recommend public policies that promote both farm livelihoods and environmental protection.

Ikerd's column is followed by a commentary. In *Enhancing public health through modern agronomy: Sustainable and nutrient-rich practices*, **Amanullah** and **Urooj Khan** review nine tenets of agronomy and its potential as a catalyst for transforming public health and the quality of life for individuals and communities worldwide.

Next, we continue our special collection of papers on Fostering Socially and Ecologically Resilient Food and Farm Systems Through Research Networks, co-sponsored by INFAS, eOrganic, and USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, including the following three papers:

**Marc T. Sager**, **Lily Binford**, and **Anthony J. Petrosino** explore the challenges faced by staff and students engaged in managing a college campus-based farm and offer recommendations for improving its operations in the commentary *Staff and student engagement on and perceptions of a college campus's urban farm*.

In *Participatory breeding in organic systems: Experiences from maize case studies in the United States*, **Christopher Mujabi**, **Martin O. Bohn**, **Michelle M. Wander**, and **Carmen M. Ugarte** present the challenges to meaningfully engaging farmers in breeding maize to increase crop performance. They conclude there is a critical role for land-grant universities in supporting such efforts, especially at minority-serving institutions.

In his paper *Climate resilient food systems and community reconnection through radical seed diversity*, **Chris Smith** explores declining agrobiodiversity and community seed-keeping and concludes that radical seed diversity can jump-start autonomous, community-based seed-keeping efforts, increasing agrobiodiversity and, ultimately, the climate resilience of food systems.

**Katherine Merritt**, **Jill K. Clark**, and **Darcy A. Freedman** then present a systematic review of the literature to find whether and in what ways social entrepreneurship intersects with food sovereignty and food justice, and find they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, in *Social enterprise, food justice, and food sovereignty: Strange bedfellows or systemic supports?*

<sup>1</sup> See the video at <https://youtu.be/456GZRzC5PE?si=h0Eq8Lx4y4cEdic1>

Next, in *An evaluation of the federal Transition Incentives Program on land access for next-generation farmers* **Megan Horst, Julia Valliant, and Julia Freedgood** evaluate the USDA's Transition Incentives Program (which provides two years of funding incentives for renting or selling land to socially disadvantaged farmers) and find uneven geographic distribution of program benefits. They offer some insights on how the program can be improved.

In *Challenging power relations in food systems governance: A conversation about moving from inclusion to decolonization*, the **Session on Participatory Food Systems Governance at the 2021 Global Food Governance Conference**, **Renzo Guinto, Kip Holley, Sherry Pictou, Rāwiri Tinirau, Fiona Wiremu, Peter Andréé, Jill K. Clark, Charles Z. Levkoe, and Belinda Reeve** reflect on the key themes that emerged from their "Session on Participatory Food Systems Governance" at the 2021 Global Food Governance Conference. They conclude that more decolonization work is required to undo inequitable forms of food systems governance, including building a more effective research agenda that leads to increased BIPOC scholarship as well as planetary health.

This is followed by *Gender, sexuality, and food access: An exploration of food security with LGBTQIA2S+ university students* by **Eli G. Lumens, Mary Beckie, and Fay Fletcher**. Using intersectional and queer theory and qualitative evidence provided by a small group of participants, the authors examine the lived experience of the LGBTQIA2S+ community at a southern U.S. university and find that attitudes regarding sexual identity and the overall stigma associated with needing food assistance amplify their struggle to achieve food security.

In *Disparities in COVID-19 vaccine uptake, attitudes, and experiences between food system and non-food system essential workers*, **Brianna L. Smarsh, David Yankey, Mei-Chuan Hung, Heidi M. Blanck, Jennifer L. Kriss, Michael Flynn, Peng-Jun Lu, Sherri McGarry, Adrienne C. Eastlake, Alfonso Rodriguez Lainz, James A. Singleton, and Jennifer M. Lincoln** conducted a large national study and find that food system workers tended to not get vaccinated as much as other workers, highlighting a potential vulnerability in the food system.

In their innovative project, **Sarah A. Stotz, Hollyanne Fricke, Carmen Byker Shanks, Megan Reynolds, Tessa Laswell, Laurel Sanville, Rachel Hoh, and Courtney A. Parks** studied the funding applications of organizations that are focused on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among low-income residents to shed light on their common program needs in *Strengthening nutrition incentive and produce prescription projects: An examination of a capacity building and innovation fund*.

Next, in their reflective essay, *First you need the farmers: The microfarm system as a critical intervention in the alternative food movement*, **Kent Curtis and Grace Cornell** detail the challenges of implementing a holistic seed-to-table local food system development project in the U.S. state of Ohio.

This is followed by **Anna M. Roodhof**, who explores and characterizes community-based food forests and finds a wide range of diversity in practices, along with homogeneity in stakeholder demographics, in *Understanding the emerging phenomenon of food forestry in the Netherlands*.

**Simone Ubertino, Romain Dureau, Marie-Ève Gaboury-Bonhomme, and Laure Saulais** then explore the strengths and challenges of building trust and having meaningful impact in *Democratizing food systems: A scoping review of deliberative mini-publics in the context of food policy*.

In our final paper, *Public assistance, living environments, and food insecurity: A comparative community case study*, **Mesfin Bezuneh and Zelealem Yiheyis** explore food insecurity in traditional and mixed-income public housing communities and find that government assistance in terms of reducing food insecurity is wanting. They suggest that perhaps increased assistance levels are needed to have a measurable impact.


We wrap up with several book reviews. **Mallory Cerkleski** reviews *Distress in the Fields: Indian Agriculture after Economic Liberalization*, edited by R. Ramakumar, along with *Agrarian Reform and Farmer Resistance in Punjab: Mobilization and Resilience*, by Shinder Singh Thandi. **Natasha Bernstein Bunzl** reviews *Feeding New Orleans: Celebrity Chefs and Reimagining Food Justice*, by Jeanne K. Firth. **Bob Perry** reviews *At the Table: The Chef's Guide to Advocacy*, by Katherine Miller; and **Max Sano** reviews *Gardening at the Margins: Convivial Labor, Community, and Resistance*, by Gabriel R. Valle.

Though it was not formally by design, a clear theme of transformative action emerged in this issue. In the above papers we see the development of public policies and community development strategies that are in some cases resulting in measurable impacts and in others coming up short. Naturally, there will always be setbacks and failed attempts. But my cup-is-half-full takeaway from this applied research is that with holistic and concerted effort across all fronts, we will see, in the long run (should we not run out of time), breakthroughs that lead to equity and resilience in food systems. The trick, of course, is slowing the pace, if not reversing, climate change, land loss, and human population growth so that we have a chance for innovative policies and practices to benefit people and the planet in the future.

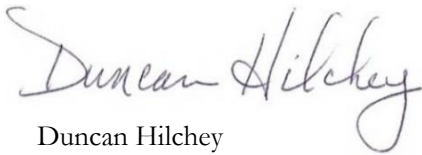
While John Ikerd calls for haste in this effort on the policy and practice front, Christine Porter gives us a glimpse at how activist scholars can contribute through their approach to practitioner engagement in research. In 2018, Christine submitted to JAFSCD and we published a paper entitled: *Triple-rigorous storytelling: A PI's reflections on devising case study methods with five community-based food justice organizations.*<sup>2</sup>

This was a stunningly candid self-reflection on her experience shepherding a multiyear, US\$5 million, USDA-funded action-research project called Food Dignity. In the Food Dignity project, Porter worked with and learned from leaders of five community-based food justice organizations. What an earful and eyeful she got in that experience. She bared it all with us in this must-read essay. We are the beneficiaries of her fearlessness.

In wrapping up this editorial, I share with great sorrow that Christine has been living with Stage 4 breast cancer for some time. Her fearlessness extends to how she has openly and gracefully shared her cancer journey and treatment over the years. As she moves closer to the end of that journey, some of her colleagues and mentees are collaborating with us to host a *Festschrift* in her honor. A *Festschrift* (or “celebratory writing”) is a traditional way for colleagues at scholarly institutions and organizations to celebrate the contributions of a valued colleague. JAFSCD has published two *Festschriften* in the past.<sup>3</sup>

In Christine’s case, we celebrate her and the advances in the food systems and community-based participatory action research that she has led and supported so far in her career. It will also serve as an opportunity for Christine to share more of her thoughts on triple-rigorous research, on Food Dignity and its successor, Growing Resilience, and in engaging practitioners in the co-creation of applied research on food systems. An announcement of the *Festschrift* is forthcoming later in 2024. 

Yours for transformative action in food systems and publishing,



Duncan Hilchey  
Publisher and editor-in-chief

## Reference

Center for Transformative Action. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from <https://www.centerfortransformativeaction.org/about-us>

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<sup>2</sup> Read the full article at <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2018.08A.008>

<sup>3</sup> See the *Festschrift* for urban agriculture advocate Jac Smit at <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2010.012.009> and for Syracuse University Professor Evan Weissman at <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.104.032>