

**PREFACE TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
PLACE-BASED FOOD SYSTEMS CONFERENCE**

## Place-based food systems: Making the case, making it happen

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In less than a century, our food system has been transformed into a complex network of global-industrial supply chains, increasingly disconnecting us from the people and processes that provide our food. Such a ‘market-driven’ system externalizes many of its social, environmental, and economic costs. At the same time, it concentrates power and profits among a few stakeholders who maintain hegemonic control of the food systems, yet are often far removed from its negative impacts. The list of transgressions is long and familiar to us: extensive environmental degradation, unjust labor conditions for food workers, the collapse

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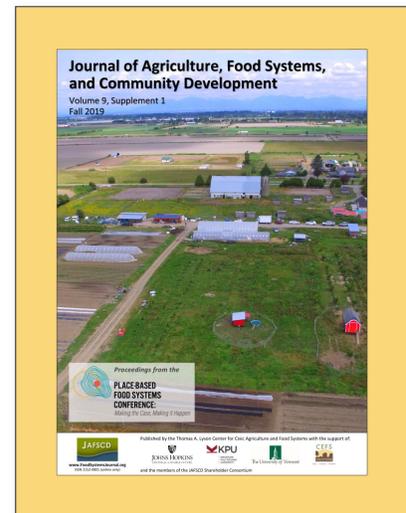
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of farming communities, epidemic occurrence of western diet–related disease, biodiversity loss, and on it goes. It is a system that produces more food than at any period in history—more than enough to feed the global population (Holt-Giménez, Shattuck, Altieri, Herren, & Gliessman, 2012, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2017)—yet leaves more than one in 10 people experiencing hunger (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], International Fund for Agriculture Development [IFAD], UNICEF, World Food Programme [WFP], & World Health Organization [WHO], 2019).

But, contrary to former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal rebuke,<sup>1</sup> there is an alternative.

We can glean from humanity’s 11,000-year agricultural history, including the hard lessons learned over the last 60 years of food system globalization and industrialization, to envision and create a better food system for the future. Indeed, many community leaders, food system businesses, and academics are striving to do just that. The food system future they are working toward responds to the needs of their communities. It does this by not only providing access to sufficient, safe, and culturally appropriate food, but also by upholding the community’s economic, social, and ecological well-being. These are place-based food systems.

Navigating toward a better food system future will require a dramatic change in thinking and concerted action from both academics and communities. As such, we wanted to provide a platform to share the latest research that makes the case for place-based food systems, as well as innovative practices putting place-based food systems into action. The foundation for the conference *Place-Based Food Systems: Making the Case, Making It Happen* came from this aspiration.

The programmatic focus at Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s Institute for Sustainable Food Systems and the Sustainable Agriculture Program is an exception to the norm. Our applied research, extension, and education programming concentrates exclusively on advancing food systems that are attuned to and nurturing of the environmental and cultural community character of our life-places. Conversely, the rank and file at mainstream colleges and faculties of agriculture are vested largely in maintaining the status quo of the global-industrial food system. Yet within these bastions are those who champion the concept of the place-based food system, and who are prepared to work with community place-based food system leaders and builders. Many such people participated in this conference. It was a tonic and inspiration to connect with so many like-minded academic and community leaders. We feel these exchanges are required to advance place-based food systems as a well-regarded academic focus and a central dimension of community development. Thus we sincerely hope this conference is not a one-off event, and that the momentum connecting academic researchers and civil actors results in a regular exchange of ideas and work.

Our hope for the conference was that participants would gain an empowering vision of the critical role that place-based food systems can and will play in achieving our sustainable economic, ecological, and societal futures. We also hoped it would foster more collaboration between community activists and academics. Although the conference was North American–focused, it attracted participation from activists and academics from around the world, including China, India, the UK, Portugal, and Ireland.

The conference was opened with a welcome and blessing from Kwantlen First Nation Elder and KPU Elder in Residence *Leyketan*. Kwantlen Polytechnic University, as well the communities and farms of southwest British Columbia, are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Nations and Peoples. The subject of Indigenous foodways and sovereignty was incorporated throughout the conference program.

Over 50 oral and panel presentations were given. These were selected to address the following questions:

- How can place-based food systems contribute to sustainable human economies?
- How can place-based food systems foster environmental stewardship and ecological integrity?

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There\\_is\\_no\\_alternative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_is_no_alternative)

- What policy and governance structures are critical to advancing place-based food systems?
- How can we increase the capacity of place-based food systems?

Additionally, 14 community-focused projects were showcased via poster presentations.

Eight invited plenary session speakers reflected these themes with presentations distributed throughout the conference. In the spirit of the conference, we sought to pair civic leaders with those from academic institutions to highlight how complementary research, extension, and community action can incite transformative food system collaborations.

We had the goal of creating an exchange that lived the place-based values it was aiming to advance. From minimizing waste, to the careful sourcing of venue and materials, to reducing barriers to participation by providing small grants—our hope was to have an event that was as sustainable and inclusive as possible. Some of these undertakings were easy, like foregoing conference swag. Others were more involved, like adopting a 100% local procurement policy for catering (with the important exceptions of coffee and tea). These efforts were not perfect, and we learned a great deal in the process. Much like the conference itself, we hope that the effort here is another step toward sustainability, inclusion, and the creation of communities that are better connected to place. We believe that efforts big and small all add up.

We are grateful to all who presented and participated for making this such an enriching exchange. We are also grateful to the conference planning committee members: Marcy Ostrom, Washington State University; Mary Beckie, University of Alberta; Alison Blay-Palmer, Wilfred Laurier University; Sarah Elton, University of Toronto; Greg Cameron, Dalhousie University; and Amy Christian and Duncan Hilchey, Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems (publisher of the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*).

We are exceedingly proud and pleased to have partnered with the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* to publish these conference proceedings. All conference presenters were invited to submit a paper for the proceeding. Herein you will find 30 submissions covering the breadth of conference themes, including eight manuscripts from plenary speakers, nine peer-reviewed papers, 12 ‘snapshot’ papers, and one viewpoint paper. Our hope in producing these proceedings is, of course, to further the utility of the conference and support collaborative research, extension, and community action toward place-based food systems that nurture people, community, and Mother Earth.

Ultimately our challenge is to reconnect people to each other, to the earth, to deeply meaningful purpose, and to place. Toward this, our food systems offer a perfect path forward.

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