

WRITTEN COMMENTS submitted to Office of the Chief Scientist, USDA

Per March 2, 2017 Listening Session

Submitted by 18 food-and-farm organizations and 20 individual food-and-farm practitioners
(see complete list below)

Visioning of United States Agricultural Systems for Sustainable Production

Over the next 50 years, U.S. agriculture must shift to diverse, resilient, adaptive and regenerative systems that mimic nature, stimulate healthy soils, restore ecosystems, benefit human health, ensure human safety, sustain just and livable employment at all points in the supply chain, increase biodiversity, and build communities of practice, to ensure the vitality of human health and local economies.

We envision agricultural systems that are:

- **Accessible to all**

Everyone's right to safe, healthy, nutrient-dense food will be recognized and fulfilled. Agriculture will be a thriving, diverse, widespread, and common practice that nearly everyone engages in, including in urban settings. Farmers in the US will be diverse in age, gender, race, and ability; location and income will not be a barrier to participating in the cultivation and consumption of food.

- **Regionally self-sufficient**

Food and fiber production will be integrated into daily life in homes, schools, healthcare and community centers, workplaces, and public spaces, in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Most food and fiber will be consumed close to where it is produced. Waste will be drastically reduced or used according to the EPA waste hierarchy and surplus will be distributed. US regional food systems will be resilient against catastrophic weather events and will be able to adapt to changes in supply from elsewhere. US-grown produce will be competitive against imported produce, and local/regional food will be the norm instead of a specialty.

- **Healing people and the planet**

Food and farming will be the foundation of individual, public, and environmental health. Food production will have shed its greenhouse gas emissions and become a sink that cleans the atmosphere of pollution. Agriculture will be used to create resilience to and eventually reverse climate change. Food and fiber production systems will be planned and managed to restore soils, waterways, ecosystems, environments and wild spaces.

- **Fair**

Food and fiber production will be an honored profession. The true value of producers' efforts will be recognized and compensated. Production systems will no longer rely on underpaid labor, prices below the cost of production, or negative externalities. New economic systems will emerge to create greater opportunities for more people in food and fiber production. All people working in the food system will earn living wages and enjoy the same labor rights as workers in other industries.

- **Democratic**

Localities will have decision-making authority and control over their resources, while acting with neighboring communities to establish regional cooperation. Robust food policy councils at the municipal, county, state, and regional levels will guide agricultural systems. The councils will be instruments of democratic and civic engagement with governmental decision-making capacity on issues relating to health, energy, the planning of developed areas, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, the restoration of wild areas, resource utilization, management of the economy, etc. Participation in food policy councils will be open to all.

We recommend the USDA focus its research on:

NUTRIENT DENSITY AND DIVERSITY to reorient food production for quality as well as calories.

SOIL REGENERATION, the foundation of life on Earth. Research should focus on soil as a complex living entity to be managed for maximum carbon storage, water holding capacity, production, nutrition, and resilience. Soil building strategies, including composting, biochar, adaptive multi-paddock grazing and plant biodiversity, should be investigated. Restoring soils in urban communities should also be investigated to make more space available in cities for food production.

HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE POLYCULTURES that integrate large varieties of plants and animals, annuals and perennials, and food and fiber, to maximize productivity, soil health, nutrient density, and pest suppression, in a closed system where all inputs and sources of fertility are produced on the farm. Design and implementation strategies from permaculture, organic farming, biodynamic farming, North American indigenous nations, and other traditional farming methods should be investigated.

ON-FARM ENERGY PRODUCTION that doesn't hinder or compete with food production.

DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES that spur sustainable agriculture such as collaborative research, food policy councils, participatory budgeting, collectives, public banks, community supported agriculture, seed banks, community land trusts, and worker-run businesses.

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FOOD PRODUCERS with farm-to-school programs, school gardens, new farmer mentorship programs, and classes in nutrition, holistic management, ecology, etc., to spark an interest in, and provide the skills needed for, careers in food production. This education should be available to people at all ages and education levels. Research should identify best practices for ensuring that each generation has a sufficient number of farmers ready to steward the land as older farmers retire.

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