



Sustainable Food Laboratory

Learning History Chapter Four

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MID-COURSE REVIEW

**EARTH UNIVERSITY, Costa Rica
November 8-11, 2005**

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INTRODUCTION

This fourth installment of the Learning History of the Sustainable Food Laboratory (SFL) follows the Mid-Course Review at EARTH University in Costa Rica in November 2005. The intention of this history is to use the words of the participants themselves—captured in the right-hand column of this document—to describe the thinking and learning of the group at this stage in the process in order to support further reflection and learning as the work of the Food Lab goes forward. At this time, the Food Lab has consisted of five major events and many activities and meetings in between:

- The Foundation Workshop in Bergen, Netherlands (June 2004)
- Three Learning Journeys in Brazil (August and September 2004)
- The Innovation Retreat in the United States (November 2004)
- The Design Studio in Austria (April 2005)
- The Mid-Course Review in Costa Rica (November 2005)

This chapter builds on the previous three Learning Histories: *Chapter One: the Foundation Workshop* (June 2004), *Chapter Two: the Learning Journeys and Innovation Retreat* (November 2004), and *Chapter Three: the Design Studio* (April 2005).

Chapter One tells the story of the initial Lab Team meeting in the Netherlands, where the group explored a number of foundational concepts: shared and divergent definitions of “sustainability,” existing efforts to move parts of the food system toward greater sustainability, and dilemmas faced by the players in the food system. The participants also outlined the beginning of a learning agenda for the Lab Team. During that meeting and the subsequent Learning Journeys in Brazil, the Lab Team Members reported an increasing appreciation for the complexity of the food system.

Team Member comment at Foundation Workshop in Bergen:

“I am interested in the outcomes that people have stated repeatedly in terms of getting some kind of shared understanding of definition, getting some projects that are really about scaleable mainstreaming, and also having new ideas generated that come from the interaction of different points of view and working at the margins. These things are really critical for all of us.”

Team Member closing comments in Foundation Workshop:

“My surprise is that – given that I’ve thought a lot about sustainable food systems—my thinking has gotten far beyond where I was before. I didn’t expect to move that far.”

Chapter Two reflects experiences of the Learning Journeys in Brazil and the Innovation Retreat in Arizona. This phase was characterized by (1) a deepening commitment on the part of Lab Members to work together to shift the food system and (2) increasing excitement about initiatives they hoped would affect the system. Many Lab Members referred to trust and respect as key elements of interactions among participants during this period.

Chapter Three follows the work of the initiative teams as they formed, defined their work, invited new members to participate, and explored the potential for connections between the initiatives.

Note: Over one-third of the current Lab members joined in the second year of the project, after the events chronicled in chapters One, Two and Three of the Learning History. For those readers who are unfamiliar with the early work of the Food Lab, a thorough synopsis of its early development and conceptual underpinnings begins on page 38 of this document. The previous chapters of the Learning History are also available. The Learning History is primarily intended for use by participants in the Sustainable Food Lab: members of the Lab Team and Secretariat, Executive Champions, advisors, and funders. Permission is required for more public distribution.

OVERVIEW

This fourth installment of the Learning History reflects the thinking and learning that occurred during the period from the end of the Design Studio in Austria in April 2005 through the Mid-Course Review workshop in Costa Rica in November 2005. Events during that time involved work in each of six multinational initiative teams, the third of five Food Lab workshops, a Commodity Retreat attended by a subset of the Lab Team, a Learning Journey in China, and numerous collaborations on trainings, presentations, research, and business transactions.

Team Member closing comment in Arizona Retreat:

“It amazes me that you can take a group that has been doing individual things to some extent and be able to build such a huge amount of trust. As I remember, the people coming to Bergen were quite polarized in their views, which has fully disappeared during this week.”

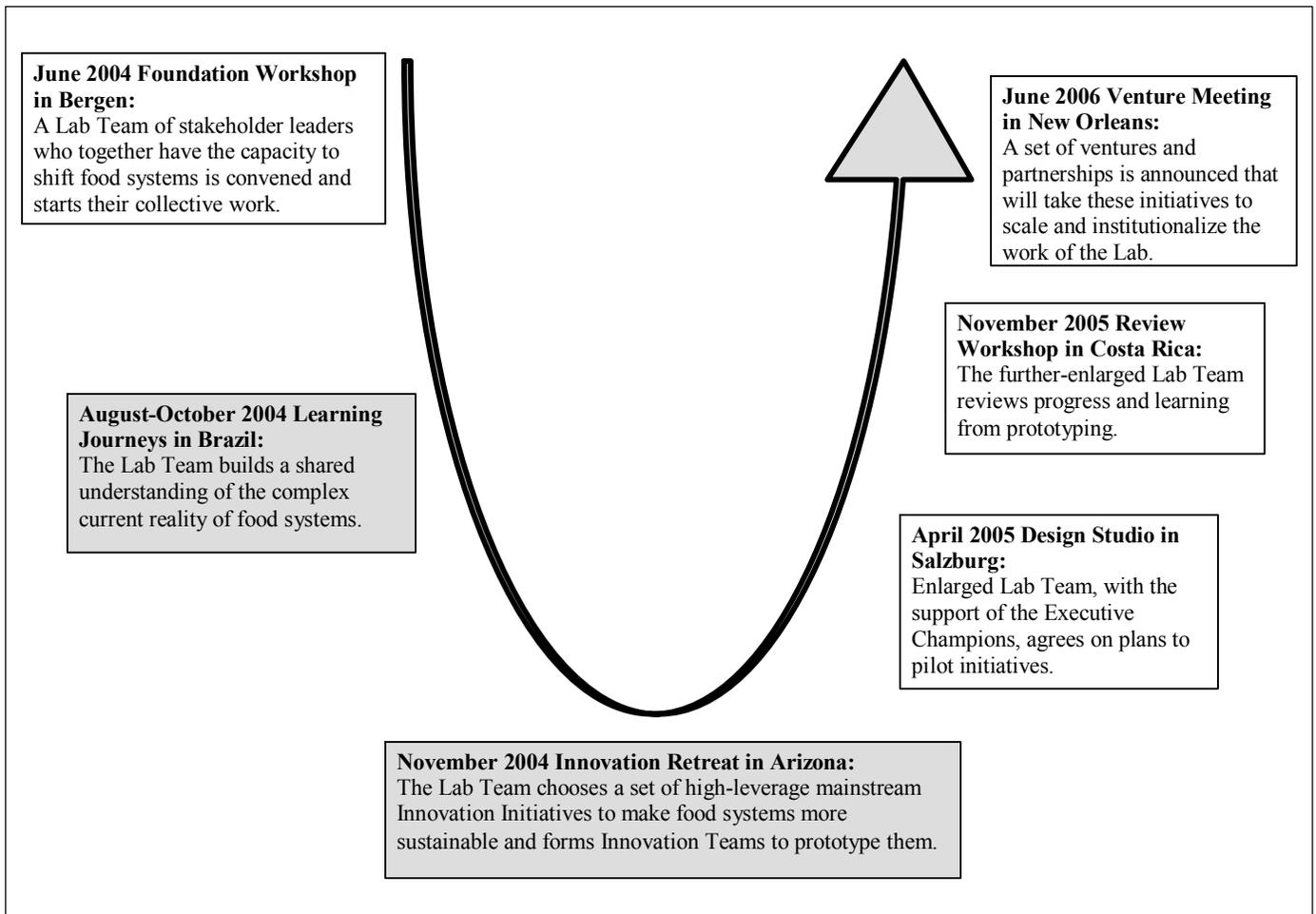
Lab Member comments in Costa Rica:

“By June 2006, we won’t have transformed food systems but quite possibly we may have achieved a large group of people beginning to understand the complexity of the challenges they are trying to address and the way in which they can work together to address them. If we achieve that, that’s a lot.”

The design of the Lab is based on the U-Process, a method for deep innovation that has been developed and applied over a 20-year period. The U-Process has three phases: co-sensing, co-presencing, and co-creating. The Foundation Workshop focused primarily on the *co-sensing* phase—that of exploring the varied perspectives and priorities within the team in order to understand the complexity of the current reality in the food system. The *co-presencing* phase—that of seeing what sense can be made of the complexity of the system, was introduced at the Innovation Retreat. The *co-creating* phase, in which the group understanding and work coalesce into practical initiatives, is the theoretical location of the work detailed in this chapter of the Learning History.

Lab Member Comment in Costa Rica:

“Without the U, these people wouldn’t have come together and we wouldn’t have gotten as far as we have. In the future, we need to be truer to the U-Process and hold people’s feet to the fire about the ‘co’ part.”



This chapter of the Learning History focuses on three central developments articulated by Food Lab members during the period between April 2005 and the end of the year:

- **Formal Systems Analysis.** Analysis of system impact became more formal with the Commodity Retreat, a small gathering convened by Food Lab Advisor Peter Senge to delve into the dynamics of the commodity system. The ideas were developed further during the introductory work at the Costa Rica meeting. Lab Members specifically identified where in the system the current initiative strategies are meant to leverage change.
- **Deliverables.** The work of the initiatives focused increasingly on outcomes and deliverables. Though each initiative pursued a different strategy, they all worked toward final implementation and a diffusion of their results.
- **Evaluation.** Lab members began in earnest to evaluate and assess the learning and accomplishments of the Food Lab thus far. In the process of stepping back to ask questions about the Lab's strategy and focus, the Lab Team took increased ownership of the process and direction of the Lab.

Overlaying these developments in the Lab are two dynamic tensions that have characterized the development of the initiatives during this period: the challenge of holding onto the initial goal of creating systemic change while acting on specific, incremental interventions; and the challenge of maintaining institutional integrity and benefits while developing relationships across non-traditional boundaries.

The tension between systemic and incremental change was influenced by the relatively independent work of the six initiative teams in this period. Although many Lab Members participate in more than one initiative team, and several initiatives required participation across sectors, the focus of most of the work of the Lab

Lab Member introduction at Commodity Retreat:

“In the first mission statement [our business] wrote for our sustainable agriculture initiative, we defined sustainable agriculture and said that we would develop market mechanisms that could help the markets for sustainable products. And that for me has always been the heart of the problem. Until this very day, I have never been able to actually see how we can change the modeling of markets so that they would support sustainability solutions. Whatever kind of logic I have tried to apply, I always ended up with conflicting results where some things would work but other things would not.”

“So, that’s my challenge—how to look at these larger systemic forces without getting paralyzed and maintain the energy for doing what we can now, but also to begin thinking what else might need to happen.”

during this period was on the development of fairly autonomous projects rather than on developing synergy among the multiple strategies.

The tension between creating non-traditional collaborations and respecting the needs of the home institutions is most evident in reports from both business and NGO members that they have been criticized for their active participation in the Food Lab because of the inherent risks of collaborating with competitors (in the business sector) and adversaries (in collaborations between NGOs and business). According to Lab Members, this very real tension is balanced by their belief in the genuine potential for increased success through these unique collaborations.

The emerging insights, challenges and aspirations of the membership of the Food Lab during this phase of the Lab are fueled by the developments in systems analysis, concrete deliverables and measurable evaluation.

Evolving Actions

From the inception of the Food Lab, members have articulated their shared sense that humanity has yet to develop a sustainable global system of food production and distribution. They generally agree that shifting the economic, environmental, social, and political aspects of the global food system toward greater sustainability is critical to charting a future in which the earth will need to feed nine billion people. Given the shared and oft-stated determination to act on—rather than theorize about—the food system by prototyping innovations, the work of the Initiative teams became the Lab’s core feature in 2005.

In this phase of the Food Lab, the focus is on creating a number of “living examples” of a more sustainable food system. Each initiative has developed a problem analysis, a set of strategies, and desired outcomes that are germane to the initiative itself. Each prototyping initiative also involves a longer-term strategy for replicating and diffusing its strategies and outcomes—

Lab Member comments in Costa Rica:

“At all levels, the Food Lab has allowed people to think about what matters and how you begin to address that. That’s one of the great things about it – the opportunity it affords people who would never be in the same room, let alone talk to each other—to begin exploring those challenges.”

Business Leader comment at a meeting of Lab Executive Champions in early 2006:

“I am convinced that the world is not capable of feeding nine billion people in the second half of this century, in our grandchildren’s world. We know the dynamics of producing food commodities – as volume increases prices drop, with the consequence that small farmers are marginalized. Those farmers move to the slums of the world’s biggest cities. The eco- system loses diversity and becomes more vulnerable. Furthermore, the world’s agricultural areas are degrading. We see the system cannot work. What the Sustainable Food Lab is doing has never been done before, this intersection of private and public institutions. This is the greatest hope I have for finding a way through these

both within Lab organizations and among wider circles of stakeholders in the food system. The tension between short-term outcomes and longer-term strategies underpins many of the discussions about the effectiveness of the Food Lab.

Because the concrete work of the Initiatives provides the context for the questions, learnings, and reflections of the Lab Team during this period, the following is a brief summary of the current Initiatives under development.

Business Initiatives:

In early 2006 representatives from sixteen leading businesses in the food industry met at SYSCO headquarters in Houston, Texas to articulate a shared framework of sustainability and to support common initiatives on standards, packaging and small farmer access to markets. Companies are working to harmonize standards in the form of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) requirements for producers of specific products and exploring sustainable packaging alternatives, animal welfare issues and collaborating with non-business players in the Food Lab to innovate in specific supply chains so that social and environmental outcomes are improved.

The first supply chain assessment was launched at the request of a participating multinational food company seeking to assess whether its price was sufficient for a “fair” livelihood for producers. CIAT (International Center for Tropical Agriculture) and Oxfam agreed to conduct an assessment and work with the company to understand and improve the livelihoods for the farmers in its existing supply chains. The group of collaborators has shifted as the primary producer cooperative became involved, along with Counterpart International. This multi-sector group is developing assessment methods that they intend to utilize in other supply chains within their own businesses and also to share with other

complex dynamics to a livable world.”

Lab Member comments in Costa Rica discussion of learnings about system change:

“We should be careful to focus upon the initial objective: to develop practices or trials that will show to the world that upgrading sustainable food production from niche to mainstream is necessary, and, if we cooperate, it is feasible.”

Business Leader comment in Business Coalition dialogue, Jan. 2006:

“The need for this work [multi-sectoral sustainability work] is clear. There is an opportunity now not only to think about preventing harm or reducing degradation and negative impacts, but a real opportunity to think about rejuvenating and regenerating the system. That is true on multiple levels—rejuvenating the soil, the air, and communities—all while providing the differentiated products on which we depend.”

Latin American Smaller Farmer Initiative leader comment in Fall 2005:

“Some of the farmer questions are challenging me in terms of how the collective action will unfold and interface with shared responsibility, individual responsibility, and initiative leadership. What is at the heart of the matter is how a market-based or market-driven project promotes collective action (for the greater good) while at the same time managing the very individualistic and entrepreneurial drive that serves

members of the Business Coalition. Much of this work is confidential at present, with relationships and plans for financial transparency still tentative. The ultimate goal of the work, however, is to produce “how-to” field books of tools, methods, case studies and stories that will help spread these experiments to other companies and chains.

smallholder farmer leaders well and that is needed to make the project a success.”

The work on IPM standards adoption began when Lab member *Jasper Wyman and Son* committed up to \$150,000 over five years for a Food Lab-inspired project to provide incentives for raspberry growers to incorporate IPM practices. The standards will be audited to SYSCO standards. The goals of the program are to spread income benefits to small farmers in a specific supply chain and link that outcome with reduced pesticide use in the production methods. Over 300 growers will initially be affected by this program. The wider application of this prototype will begin with Food Lab businesses and expand to the wider business community.

Product differentiation for small-scale sustainably harvested fish:

The Fish Initiative strategy has focused on enhancing consumer understanding of the concept of sustainable fishery management and creating economically viable models of marine resource management. In one Fish Initiative project, Food Lab member Carrefour, Europe’s largest retail chain, has developed a formal relationship with the National Association of Small Boat Owners in Iceland in order to procure line-caught cod. The cod will be marketed and sold in Carrefour’s hypermarkets in France and Belgium under a new logo, “Pêche Responsable,” designed to raise awareness and create market demand among consumers for responsibly harvested fish. As part of this initiative, Carrefour is also developing a proposed certification program for sustainably harvested fish, with the hopes that it will eventually become an industry standard.

An Icelandic Quota Fund:

Another project of the Fish Initiative involves the creation of a Sustainable Fish Quota Fund in Iceland for boats that use sustainable fishing practices. The fund, which is being developed in concert with financial advisors from Rabobank International, will enable interested parties to buy fish quotas from boats with destructive fishing gear (trawlers) and move those quotas to boats with more environmentally and socially sound harvesting techniques (long line). This primarily affects fishers in Iceland, where 40% of the GDP comes from fishing.

A Benchmarking Tool:

The Responsible Commodities Initiative is developing a benchmarking tool aimed at improving the way agricultural commodities are produced through clearer focus on key, measurable impacts. The tool assesses the multi-stakeholder development of standards for large-scale commodity production and is based on cost effective and demonstrable impacts. The goal of this group is to create a meta-tool for creating standardized certification schemes that (1) can operate at scale, (2) have demonstrable impact, and (3) were developed in a clear, equitable, and transparent way. The first trial run of the benchmarking tool was with bananas, but it has not yet been field-tested.

The benchmarking tool assesses current certification schemes on a number of criteria, including process, focus and performance. The process criteria for the benchmarking tool assess whether the standards were developed via a multi-stakeholder process, particularly:

- Did the process include all relevant stakeholder groups?
- Was it transparent?
- Is participation voluntary, mandatory, or de facto mandatory?
- Is third-party certification required or is compliance self-declared or second-party audited

Fish Team member comment in Costa Rica during a discussion of system change:

“I don’t agree that we can’t change the system. We can. Icelandic fishermen changed a piece of the system. If we [the fishermen] can change some part of the system, we in this room [the full Lab Team] can definitely change a system.”

Responsible Commodity Initiative presentation in Costa Rica:

“Our primary objective is the development of standards for the responsible production and trade of commodities in mainstream markets. What remains unclear is how to get there.”

RCI team member comment on email discussion:

“I still believe it is the intent of the RCI to enhance the scope and leverage of certification so that impacts can be more clearly demonstrated, so that a wider range of producers can benefit more clearly, so that we can promote market based improvements in environmental/ social performance, and particularly to address the challenges of production at a commodity rather than a farm level. I think this last point is critical and perhaps we haven’t spent enough time thinking through and agreeing on its implications. Existing standards and certification systems provide guidance

The “focus” assessment aspect of the tool concentrates on key environmental or social aspects such as:

- Does the program explicitly address the main impacts of production?
- Does the standard give clear guidance and advice on how impacts can be measured and how the effect of implementing practices is monitored?
- Do the goals address social, environmental and economic/financial sustainability?

Finally, the performance criteria considers whether the effectiveness of the standard can be assessed by asking questions such as:

- Are the social, environmental or economic standards measurable? Are they measured?
- Does the standard form a good basis for practical verification, i.e. auditing?
- If the program certifies a product, is that product ever tested for residues as a part of the program?
- Is the product traceable through the supply chain?

Alternative Frames:

The Framing Initiative has conducted research in the U.S and Europe to discover the conceptual underpinnings of consumer attitudes toward food and food systems. The team presented its initial research findings at the Costa Rica Review Meeting.

In the U.S., qualitative research has revealed that consumers are trapped in a mindset that focuses solely on the personal aspects of food—in particular, on their shopping experience and on the food “in the refrigerator.” Any new information is viewed through this personal lens, thus crowding out the “big picture,” and there is emotional pressure to ignore problems in the food system.

and insight into the challenges and opportunities that the market can create for more sustainable production. The challenge we have set ourselves is to use these experiences – and other material – to explore how the RCI can accelerate and broaden the adoption of measures that will reduce the negative impacts of commodity production (i.e. creating opportunities to certify bulk/undifferentiated material in potentially large volumes). The benchmarking tool – flawed and imperfect though it is at present – is our current thinking on what is necessary.”

Lab Member responses to Framing Team question: “What do you know about food systems that you wish communication experts knew?”

“Find a way to communicate that there is a crisis in food systems; that all is not well. This is apparent to most of the people in this room, but invisible to most everybody else, and so the basic motivation for ‘Why do anything at all?’ is not there. So, this is one of the most important messages that has to be conveyed.”

“People need to know that good food

When U.S. consumers are encouraged to think of the larger system, researchers found that they view the modern food system as a factory—a viewpoint that actually exaggerates the degree of modernization in current food production. In addition, since consumers view modernization as an unstoppable process, any problems are viewed as the “price” of progress.

The European research, funded by the King Baudouin Foundation, found that, compared to U.S. citizens, Europeans have a more systemic view of the food system—one where concepts of tradition are merged with health and modernity. Unlike Americans, Europeans are also highly skeptical of both government policy and food retailers. This skepticism, however, does not translate into action. Both Europeans and Americans tend toward a passive consumer stance and make similar choices regarding food. For example, the percentage of sales of organic products is similar in the U.S. and Europe. But in Europe, the passive consumer stance oscillates between skepticism about how supermarkets use their concentrated power in the system and an exaggerated sense of that power. This attitude is contrasted with the U.S., where consumers indicate great faith in the government’s ability to protect them and in corporations’ and supermarkets’ ability to safeguard the food supply in terms of quality, quantity and healthfulness.

The full reports are available on the web. The Pan-European report, *The Europeans and sustainable food, Qualitative study in 15 European countries* can be found at <http://www.kbs-frb.be>. The U.S. research, *Perceptions of the US Food System: What and How Americans Think about their Food*, can be found in PDF format at: <http://www.wkkf.org>.

The next phase of work in this Initiative will involve the diffusion of the research findings to communications teams in Food Lab businesses and NGOs and further research into the cross-continent “meta-frames” which might exist.

equals good health; bad food equals bad health. That needs to be in the public policy scenario—not, for example, to have bad food in schools.”

“People mostly still respond on cost, even when different frames are in action.”

“In the European frame, people are passive because they don’t have any power in the system. Frames that help dispel that belief would be useful. In the U.S., this idea of modernization and progress is a big thing. Are there frames that show how sustainable agriculture is progress because it doesn’t destroy the environment and is more socially just?”

“Regarding the impact the U.S. has on food markets, particularly Central and South American markets that perceive themselves as being food followers, as opposed to food leaders compared to the U.S.: We suggest that might actually be a competitive advantage. If those cultures frame their food heritage with the attitude that food from our [Central American] culture and particular culinary tradition is better than that mass, crass food that comes from ‘El Norte,’ they can turn that cultural power to an advantage.”

Institutional Sustainable Food Procurement:

The Food for Health team is bringing together government, school and hospital officials with private corporations and NGOs to explore infrastructure and policy changes that would increase the health, freshness, and local sourcing of food served in institutional and catered settings. Successful European strategies to provide sustainably produced food for municipalities and school systems are cross-fertilizing similar programs in the U.S. The Food for Health team will host a meeting in New York City in the spring of 2006, bringing together representatives from European and U.S. organizations working on these issues. The team is also developing a web-based resource platform.

The projects described above come out of the work of the six initiative teams: Business Coalition; Responsible Commodities; Food for Health, Learning and Livelihoods; Latin American Family Farmers; Framing; and Fisheries. In many cases, the strategy for the initiative began as an autonomous effort and developed into a collaboration as the work took shape. In addition to these efforts, there are many informal actions growing out of the Food Lab that are affecting trade, communities, production and the environment.

Informal Collaborations

One such collaborative action was the invitation by Food Lab Member Osler Desouzart to Jason Clay of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to address AVEXO, a poultry producers' association composed of major poultry industry businesses in Brazil, Argentina and the U.S. The seminar had in the past been strictly technical in nature, with no history of presentations from environmental NGOs. Osler jokingly tells of how he joined the Sustainable Food Lab to "teach some good sense to the NGOs," but instead ended up partnering with World Wildlife Fund for this presentation, which challenged poultry producers to reduce feed and water usage in the next 20 years through genetic improvements.

Business Leader Lab Member comments at Costa Rica meeting:

"I used to meet someone from an NGO and look around for a weapon. Now I offer them tea. I have changed as a result of the Lab and I am taking the poultry industry with me."

"The project to save water in the poultry industry is going e-x-t-r-e-m-e-l-y well. Now I think we have been

Partly due to the lack of water shortages in Brazil, Argentina and the U.S., the poultry industry has not considered the business impacts of reduced water use through increased conversion rates. (Conversion rates refer to the conversion of grain into animal protein, or the amount of grain required to produce one pound of poultry.) Increasing the conversion rate would save approximately 31 million metric tons of grain, in addition to the water used to produce it. Several leading poultry businesses are now conducting feasibility studies of this strategy, primarily because of the potential economic benefits.

modest in our goals. It seems probable we shall manage to reduce water use in the poultry breeding and industry by 50% in less than 20 years."

Another example of a fortuitous collaboration developed after Lab Member Pierre Vuarin led a group of Fish Team members on Learning Journeys in China in August 2005. As a result of the relationships that developed during that trip, Pierre and Gilles Gaebel from Carrefour began to explore a way to address the problems faced by African fishermen and poor communities surrounding Lake Victoria. Their plight is the subject of the award-winning documentary *Darwin's Nightmare*, which shows the Nile perch filets being exported from the African fishing communities to grocery stores in Europe, while the workers in the communities around Lake Victoria end up eating the heads and bones that are left behind. As a result of the conversation between these two Food Lab Members, the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation and Carrefour are jointly exploring how to set up a self-financing fund for rural development in Tanzania and Uganda.

Many additional collaborations have been reported by Food Lab members. Some are instigated by businesses seeking reliable information about sourcing fair trade products, some by NGOs and businesses seeking information on the environmental consequences of particular production practices, and still others have been initiated by financial or philanthropic institutions seeking projects with maximum potential to effect either environmental or social aspects of the food system.

Comment from NGO member of the Food Lab in Costa Rica:

"Before the Food Lab, it was not possible for me to imagine a relationship with business or enterprise. The Food Lab has created a global dynamic, an element of confidence."

These and other projects of the Food Lab have grown out of the determination initially expressed by many Lab Members to act on the system. The questions that are shaping the current and future work of the Lab focus on developing a shared articulation of the systemic changes that are needed to shift the food system toward greater sustainability, and assessing the strategies being used in these projects within that framework.

SYSTEM IMPACT

From its inception, Lab Members have asked whether it is possible to shift the global food system in a fundamental way. Whether this is achievable depends, in part, on the answers to the following questions:

- How do we define the system?
- What shift is the Food Lab attempting?
- What strategies will be most effective for achieving our goals?
- How will the outcomes be measured and evaluated?

These questions form the context in which the concrete work of the Lab Initiatives—as well as the exploration of the larger systemic impact and the assessment of the individual project effectiveness—is advancing. Although the questions have yet to be fully addressed, the actions and words of Lab Members indicate both increasing urgency and a sense of significant progress in reaching collective answers.

Commodity System Retreat: Defining the System and Identifying Desired Shifts

At each meeting of the Food Lab, a more complete picture of the global food system as experienced from multiple perspectives has emerged. At the first gathering, members discussed specific challenges they face in the food system: overproduction, trade barriers, access, distribution, volatility of prices, policy

Peter Senge reflecting on systemic change in the Food Lab:

“For me, the essence of a systemic change project is the belief that there are powerful forces at play which drive results in particular directions that are undesired. Enduring improvement requires shifting the organizational practices, operating policies, goals, norms, and mental models which are collectively driving those forces. Often people pay lip service to systemic change but do little to work to bring it about – because such change is risky, takes time and can threaten established ways of thinking and acting as well as vested interests.”

Lab Member comments at Commodity Retreat:

“There have been lots of conversations [about] the whole system for years but we’re going to need to find a way to

frameworks, loss of soil carbon, and many more. These challenges were mapped on a representation of a physical supply chain, from production through manufacturing to retail. In subsequent workshops and Learning Journeys, members have built upon aspects of that map, incorporating issues such as poverty and hunger, competition, environmental and social degradation, and global certification standards.

step away from that – to perhaps rise to another level of thinking and dialoguing about how the whole system functions. For example, some of the parts that people wanted to have fixed are probably symptoms of an unsustainable whole system, and just trying to fix them won't get us where we want to be.”

To better understand the systemic forces within the global food system and the potential system impact of the six Food Lab Initiatives, more than a dozen Lab members participated in a retreat with Peter Senge focused on this analysis. The group worked to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the whole food system using cocoa, coffee, and Guatemalan green bean supply chains as case studies.

They began the retreat by developing a big-picture map depicting the basic dynamics in a supply chain. Peter pointed out that the most useful big-picture maps are in some sense anchored to the physics of the system: “What’s moving in this system? What’s the basic flow of stuff?”

*“The basic problem that we’re discussing is **sustainability for whom?** Where the producers have not been involved, it’s sustainability for the business [but] not for many communities, many families.”*

The group then worked to articulate their own perceptions of forces at play by attempting to understand what aspects of supply chains the Sustainable Food Lab Initiatives are trying to influence and how they might do so. The strategies articulated for Food Lab Initiatives fall into three basic groups: standards for food production so that buyers and the financial community can influence outcomes; restructured supply chains to improve producer livelihoods; and increasing demand pull through public institutional procurement of healthy, sustainable food.

“What can be accomplished through standards? What other dynamics have to be addressed through other kinds of means?”

Over the course of exploring and discussing these elements of the food system, they developed a set of principles to guide their work—concepts that they felt define aspects of a desired, sustainable food system:

*“Perhaps the way to address the problems in all of this is that you need a **benevolent ethical demand**. Take organic as an example; there’s good*

- **Giving face to suppliers.** The map of the system

is only a collection boxes and words until players on that map actually get to know each other as people. When people in a system build a relationship, they are dealing with the system at a level that has the potential to shift understanding. It becomes a human system.

- Building a critical mass of **Benevolent Ethical Demand**. Assuming that market demand is one of the key forces in the system, increasing demand for environmental and social improvements would serve to move the system toward sustainability.
- More focus on **Quality Profits**. A quality profit is a profit that can be reasonably projected to persist over time, and which generates sustainable growth.
- The ability to **Hold Tensions**. Conversations about sustainability which include stakeholders throughout the system often confront tensions between the need for profit and growth, and the need for sufficiency and sustainability.

During the two-day retreat, the group honed their understanding of system forces by developing a diagram of the commodity system focused on those drivers that affect price and production dynamics. At the heart of the system is the basic overproduction/price relationship. When a product is scarce, the price for it will be high, thus stimulating increased production. Similarly, when there is more product than the market demands, the price will drop, causing production to drop. However, analysis of long-term production trends indicates this dynamic does not, in reality, operate that way.

For at least the last several decades, despite significant

demand, but is it benevolent enough? Because it's going to saturate the system."

*"One missing element in all of this is people aren't making good distinctions around the **quality of profits**. Really good, masterful executives always have a deep, refined sense in their business context of distinguishing **quality of profits** and quantity of profits."*

*"We have to think about how this profit is distributed through the supply chain because if it's distributed in a way that makes the most sense for the long term health of the supply chain, it is a **quality profit**. It's a profit we think we can sustain. It's a profit we think is consistent with our values."*

*"I have noticed conversations about sustainability inevitability have a **tension** between profit and growth, on the one hand, and sufficiency and sustainability on the other hand. There are trade-offs to hold; and that's why conversations about sustainability almost inherently have to be multi-stakeholder in order to be productive."*

"The real key is how do we have good capitalism? How do we have capitalism consistent with democracy? How do we have capitalism consistent with rights? That gets to: What does a good profit look like?"

"This diagram assumes that you actually can lower your costs to bring them back into line with a lower price; and you're saying, "No, I've seen a lot of situations where people can't lower their costs adequately but they have to stay in the market anyway". So, one thing is that

changes in policy and weather, the average net income per acre for commodity farmers, before subsidies, has hovered consistently at zero. Those farmers who have survived to buy their neighbors' failing farms are those who have produced a little more of a product a little more cheaply. Every year, newer technology enables a single owner to farm more acres, sell more of the commodity in question, and survive even on a smaller per-unit market price.

While decisions to farm more and harder with newer technology are rational on an individual scale, collectively they lead to increased total production, lower prices, and lower profits. The falling profits push individual producers to cut costs and boost production, thus perpetuating the cycle. This dynamic has been described as a "race to the bottom," where individual farmers must produce more and more just to stay in business. The trend towards ever-expanding capacity is exacerbated at the scale of global trade.

The results of commodity systems driven by growth, technology adoption and concentration are predictable: resource depletion, pollution, and a financial squeeze on producers and rural communities. Fishing and forestry tend to hit resource limits first; they run out of fish or trees. Agriculture's pressures on soil and water are less immediately noticeable, though it tends toward chronic overproduction relative to demand. In all three commodity systems, the response of producers to financial pressure is to invest in a more efficient sawmill, a bigger boat, or a newer combine—and the impact of these individually rational decisions is even more pressure on profits and on the environment.

In the discussions during the workshop about the "race to the bottom," Hal Hamilton described the dilemma it poses for Lab Members in these words: "A market economy is supposed to produce ever-increasing efficiency: lower-cost production of things we all want to buy. That's the way our economy is supposed to work, but in agriculture, forestry and fishing, at least, it has negative consequences as well as desirable ones. The

people actually persist with negative profits."

"There's an over-production cycle that continues to drive down price and people respond by producing more. There are social and environmental problems. There are quality issues. From the perspective of commodities standards, what are the kinds of things you think can be successfully addressed through standards, as you see them; what are the kinds of things that would need additional mechanisms?"

"The 'race to the bottom' is a familiar phenomenon to most segments of the food system. Every company needs to reduce margin and improve returns all the time."

"There are two basic truths that will shape the future of farming – there is a steady increase in the consumption of food and fiber produced by agriculture, while at the same time there is a steady decline in the quality and productivity of soil around the world. The two trends are on a collision course."

"Supply management (quota systems) is not everyone's favorite topic. There are a lot of well-intended initiatives around commodities and poverty, and none of them have ever made any difference, anywhere, at any time. It makes one wonder."

"I think we are talking about the 'race to the bottom,' and especially about

negative consequences are felt most strongly in producer communities, especially the smaller-scale producer communities, and certainly in the water, nature and soil where production starts. One of the challenges for our future deliberations together is to ask this question: ‘To what extent are we getting at those core system forces, in order to avoid negative consequences without sacrificing the efficiencies we value?’”

Over the course of the retreat more questions were generated than answered, but by the end the participants expressed a deeper understanding of the Food Lab’s method for analyzing interventions and strategies for large-scale system change. For the participants, the retreat demonstrated the power of using system analysis to address the very dilemmas that brought the Members into the Food Lab. The phrases “benevolent ethical demand,” “quality profits,” and a “race to the bottom” have begun to filter into conversations among Lab Members. Many Lab Members referred to these concepts as they presented initiative strategies in the November Review Meeting.

In addition to developing these draft principles of sustainable supply chains, the group summarized useful approaches to creating pictures of systems:

1. Map the ***physics of the system*** as a supply chain map identifying stakeholders who participate in different stages.
2. Map the ***forces at play***: what are we trying to influence, and what is our strategy to influence it?
3. Understand the ***consequences of strategies***: What were the intended and unintended consequences? What does this tell us about our strategies and potential new strategies to take account of feedback?

agricultural products and farmers around the world. I think that’s a very specific condition of the agricultural production if you compare it to other economic sectors. You have to think about supply management, and if you don’t think about supply management, you always will [end up in] the race to the bottom. Are there new ways of thinking about new solutions for supply management?”

“What is good about these meetings is that there is a certain amount of trust; though I’m still not entirely sure if Constantino and I have the same views on capitalism [laughter]. There is a certain amount of trust and there is a different level of respect for each other than in most of the meetings that I’ve had.”

“The thing we have not figured out, as much as many of us have been thinking about this for years and years, we have not figured out even on paper, even on a white board, a structured system that does not inadvertently lead to exactly the one you’re sitting in today.”

The system understanding gained in this retreat is promoted by many on the Team as integral to the assessment, experimentation and learning as the Lab moves toward the next phase of Initiative prototyping and development in the Sustainable Food Lab II. Future systems thinking retreats are possible.

Defining the Desired Outcomes:

Through system analysis and spirited debates, Lab Members are expanding their understanding of the food system and the dynamics within it. Although there appears to be some convergence within the Lab Team on how the system is defined, there remain many questions regarding what particular change(s) the Lab should accomplish or the most effective strategy for achieving the Lab's goals.

Goals for Food Lab prototyping initiatives fall into three basic groups:

- Standards for food production so that buyers and the financial community can influence outcomes;
- Restructured supply chains to improve livelihoods; and
- Increased demand through public education and policies that support healthy, sustainable food.

These goals for system intervention, as actualized by the six initiatives, emerged out of an intense collective process during the four-day Innovation Retreat in November 2004. They were chosen from a field of more than thirty proposed initiatives as the ones most likely to achieve high-leverage impact, to create learning and synergies, and to be achievable within the realities of the food system.

As the work of the initiatives developed over this past year, Lab Team Members gained new insights and perspectives on their own assumptions about the central systemic features that need to shift in the food system.

Lab Member Comments in Mid-Course Review Meeting session titled: What We Have Learned about System Change:

"We recognize that the primary product cost is a small fraction of the total cost of a product and that people need to come to grips with what that means about the value and price equation. We are chasing lower prices, but missing the question of the quality and value of what we're buying."

"It's becoming clearer the difficulty or complexity in trying to use a new methodology to bring about change"

For example, many business leaders on the Lab Team report appreciation for the relationship between value and price, and they believe that this is at the heart of creating a more sustainable food system. For others, balancing the tension between profit and sufficiency or between growth and sustainability holds the key to understanding the dynamics in food systems. For Lab Members working on creating standards for commodity production, fundamental change should primarily be accomplished through establishing measures of the social equity, environmental health, and/or economic impacts of any given practice, policy, or product.

and measure it using an old methodology.”

Lab Members remain curious about the collective impact of multiple interventions being undertaken on the wider system, even while they focus on their particular initiative. The learnings and evaluation of this approach will inform the plans for future prototypes, both within the Lab and in wider circles of influence.

How to accomplish the change we want: Strategic Challenges

Having defined *what* the desired outcomes are for the first round of prototyping work, the Lab Team is also experimenting with *how* to accomplish those outcomes. Both process and strategy questions were the basis for review in the Mid-Course Review meeting. Can and should the Lab focus on a few initiatives? Should all projects of the Lab be cross-sectoral? What strategies have the potential to achieve the greatest systemic impact? What is the role of personal change in accomplishing the systemic shifts identified by the Lab?

Lab Member comments in Costa Rica:

“Are we bringing about change with what we are doing? Yes. One way is through networking. If what we are doing is making us talk and link our work in so many ways, we are creating the seeds of change; that won’t be finished in June 2006. We are changing ourselves in the process.”

Maximizing Impact:

An underlying concern among some Lab Members is that the Initiatives, while significant and important, are not yet living up to the potential breakthroughs hoped for in the Foundation Workshop. This concern is based,

Lab Member comments during a Review Meeting session on system change:

in part, on a perception that the individual initiatives are likely to create incremental change rather than large-scale impact. Whether the most successful strategy is to focus all Food Lab resources on a single, high-leverage project or invest in several projects aimed at different aspects of the food system remains an open question for some members.

“What is the type of change we are looking for, incremental or transformational? Einstein said you cannot change using the same methods with which the problems were created.”

During a recent email exchange about incremental vs. fundamental innovation in the broader context of system change, Peter Senge made a distinction between invention and innovation. His thoughts are excerpted below:

“Inventions are new and often exciting, but they do not necessarily have the biggest impact on practical problems.”

“Historians of technology distinguish between two broad categories of innovation, basic innovation versus incremental innovation. Basic innovations create new industries or transform existing ones – like the telephone, polymers, the automobile or digital computation. Incremental innovations enable additional economic value to be generated in existing industries without fundamentally altering those industries. The vast majority of technological advance and most economic value-creation falls into this category. While basic innovations mark significant historical milestones, without ongoing incremental innovation they contribute only a small fraction of the economic potential of a new technology.

By analogy in the social domain, it is the combination of basic and incremental innovation that creates value. The assembly line was a basic innovation but it has been refined over centuries, through countless incremental innovations, up to the present day.

Distinguishing what really constitutes a basic from an incremental innovation can only be done retrospectively, usually after many decades. Something can be a radical new invention but never become a significant innovation. It is simply impossible to know until enough time passes and the consequences can be judged. Many inventors thought they had a breakthrough technology but for all sorts of reasons (not necessarily the merits of the technology itself) it

never became a basic innovation. This is why it seems to me that getting overly concerned about 'breakthrough innovations' seems like misplaced emphasis.

I think it is fine for people to intend to bring about breakthrough innovations, so long as they understand that this is a general intention and will not be a very useful means of discriminating the merits of one project versus another. It could lead to irresolvable subjective debates where what one person regards as a breakthrough another does not see that way. Moreover, it might bias people unduly toward what is "new" versus what might be important. This often happens when people confuse invention with innovation: inventions are new and often exciting, but they do not necessarily have the biggest impact on practical problems."

Peter's comments offer a useful lens through which to consider the various reflections on incremental vs. breakthrough strategies in the Food Lab.

The variety of perspectives among Lab Members was most evident during the plenary session of the Mid-Course Review meeting, during which Members reflected on what they were learning about how to change the food system.

For the most part, Lab Members remain curious about the collective impact of multiple interventions being undertaken on the wider system, even while they focus on their own particular initiative. But a few Lab Members have expressed doubts that the Food Lab Initiatives—either individually or in concert—have the potential to influence the basic dynamics of the food system unless the resources of the full Lab Membership focused on one or two projects. Many Lab Members feel, as Peter Senge stated, that the time horizon necessary to assess the impact on the system is too long to measure impact at this point in time. Still others believe that current incremental projects are having substantial effects and will become the seeds of the next

Lab Team comments in Costa Rica in response to an invitation to reflect on what they are learning:

"One way we could maximize our resources is to cull the number of initiatives and channel our energies into initiatives that have some real ambition to meet the objectives of the Sustainable Food Lab. The [others] can become pilot [projects]."

"I don't think we should disqualify what appear to be incremental projects now. What appear to be incremental projects can have profound effects and be leveraged. I think we have to be clear that the objective of the Food Lab was to demonstrate projects that could change the food system but didn't [necessarily] change it in two years."

"I think that only a few people actually make change; and I think if we get a few people working on different things

phase of ideas for prototyping change initiatives.

The tension within the Lab Team between the long-term strategies vs. shorter-term goals is exemplified by the work of several of the current initiatives. The teams involved in the Framing Initiative and Responsible Commodities Initiative have embraced strategies aimed at long-term change through standards and public messaging strategies, while the Business Coalition has deliberately selected “low hanging fruit” that can be achieved by the June 2006 Venture meeting and will demonstrate the Lab’s capacity to achieve short-term results.

From these exchanges, two distinct theories about systems change are emerging. One, the “One Big Lever Theory,” advocates creating a single, powerful system intervention, probably implemented through a globally accepted policy championed by private and public sectors. The Food Lab has not yet undertaken this strategy.

Another “Levers on all Sides Theory” posits the strategic effectiveness of engaging the system from multiple points simultaneously; thereby creating a groundswell of change that is replicated at increasingly far-reaching levels. Examples of this approach include the current Initiatives that focus on building prototypes of successful sustainable supply chains, developing commodity standards for institutional food buying, and educating consumers through public message campaigns.

While these two theoretical approaches are not mutually exclusive, there is currently a lack of consensus within the Lab about which of these two approaches has the highest potential to effect change in the food system.

from different angles, it will be far more productive than trying to get everybody to try to agree on anything.”

Learning Historian comment:

As is often the case in the Lab meetings, consensus on these disparate reflections was not attempted or achieved. For some Members, this lack of closure in the face of very different perspectives is a shortcoming of the Lab process. Others in the Lab express appreciation for the creation of a “safe space” to explore and reflect on opinions and perspectives that are significantly different than their own. This particular aspect of the Lab process is frequently an undercurrent in debates and evaluations, and it might prove to be fertile ground for reflection as the Lab moves toward evaluating the U-Process experience.

Lab Member comments in Costa Rica:

“Yes, we want results, but we also want to see resolve for long-term initiatives that are the seeds.”

“Is it possible for successful innovations to shift the system on a global scale? I think we can if we maximize impact with fewer, focused initiatives, defined measurable outcomes, more cross sectoral participation and a clear plan for diffusion.”

Lab Member email comment Jan. 2006:

“If there is a potential to tip the system, it can only be through the combined effect of many initiatives at once. A complex system such as the global food system would only respond

For at least some Lab Members, the strategy of engaging the system from multiple points might in fact be a way to prepare the ground for a subsequent phase focused on a single intervention in the form of a powerful, focused policy or incentive.

Holding these and other tensions is an important strength of multi-sectoral experimentation within the food system. How the group as a whole confronts these tensions will guide the ongoing work of the initiatives, including assessments and evaluations of their effectiveness.

Synergies

The Mid-Course Review meeting in Costa Rica brought systems analysis into the conversation about both the synergies among the projects and their emerging collective impact. Leading up to the meeting, a number of Lab Members raised questions about a perceived lack of synergy between the Initiatives. For some that feeling persisted, while for others the meeting provided the necessary environment for the development of collaboration and cross-project synergy.

While some Lab Members feel that concentrating resources on one or two primary Initiatives would have the most impact, others feel that impact is amplified or maximized through innovative collaborations. Thus far, collaborations have consisted primarily of cross-initiative strategies. For example, the Responsible Commodities Initiative has been working with the Food for Health team to implement a benchmarking tool that sets sustainability criteria for public and institutional food buying.

The Food for Health Initiative is working with representatives from the public, private and nonprofit sectors to identify and disseminate best practices and collectively address barriers that might prevent the delivery of high-quality foods to education and healthcare institutions. Although national and local

to pressure from all sides. That means that SFL must have the ambition to develop a portfolio of activities and foster a bundle of competencies in order to effect change.”

“The partnerships that SFL is trying to create are already business-as-usual in Europe. A first indicator of success is that SFL has succeeded in bringing together people who have something meaningful to say on these topics. The platform is a good one. That doesn’t say anything yet about actually delivering value.”

Team Member comment before Costa Rica:

“Up until now, it wouldn’t be fair criticism to say the initiatives are operating in silos, because the silos weren’t tall enough to say that there was an intent to operate separately. The big test will be Costa Rica, when we see how we can work together. To build bridges, identify ways they could synergize.”

governments, schools and hospitals across Europe are increasingly requiring healthy and sustainable food in their procurement specifications, this often results in a plethora of confusing guidelines and standards for producers, food buyers and institutional procurement officers. Developing a single benchmarking scheme and model contracts for public and institutional food services would benefit all players in these diverse supply chains.

The two initiatives, Responsible Commodities and Investment (RCI) and Food for Health, are currently examining a joint strategy in which RCI will develop appropriate metrics that demonstrate environmental and social benefits in the production of food. Those metrics will then be used by public and institutional food procurement services as a tool that allows them to ensure that they are purchasing healthy and sustainable food. It will also serve as a means of analyzing the impact of these buying practices on sustainability and health.

The first stage in this collaborative strategy will be a workshop for key stakeholder organizations on developing a sustainability metric. It will be held in partnership with the University of Cardiff on May 19, 2006.

Another example of synergistic collaboration for increased impact is the work of the Latin American Small Farmer Initiative. This group is working with business representatives to develop a combined strategy for studying the equity distribution in a single vegetable supply chain. The study involves farmer cooperatives, Oxfam, the corporation that wholesales the vegetable, and all of the processors and distributors in between. The corporation intends to offer this study as a blueprint for other businesses in the Business Coalition and beyond. It believes that there is potential to fine-tune this tool for supply chain equity studies throughout the food industry, thereby affecting a wide segment of the producer sector. The company also has the potential to apply this tool to a vast array of supply chains within its own multibillion-dollar business.

“What is at the heart of the matter is how a market-based or market-driven project promotes collective action for the greater good while at the same time managing the very individualistic and entrepreneurial drive that serves smallholder farmer leaders well and that is needed to make the project a success.”

Both of these collaborations demonstrate the guiding principle of **benevolent ethical demand** identified in the Commodity Retreat as an aspect of a desired, sustainable food system. Both have much greater potential to have a wider impact in the food system because they are collaborations between influential institutions within the system.

Cross-Sectoral Participation: Is it necessary for meaningful change?

For many members, *how* the Sustainable Food Lab develops the work of the Initiatives is intimately connected to the Lab's eventual success or failure. For these members, success is irrevocably linked to the means employed to achieve the ends, regardless of other constructive impacts of the initiatives.

Two process norms that were widely championed in the November 2004 workshop have proved challenging in the initial practical application of some of the prototypes. The first is the expectation that all initiatives be grounded in cross-sector partnerships, while a second is that each project team focus on a single prototyping project. Some Lab Members fear what they call "balkanization" among initiatives has deviated from earlier commitments that teams work through their differences to find a unified purpose.

In part, these divergences resulted from the emergent nature of initiative development process, whereby projects coalesced around topics that generated a critical mass of interest and energy among Team Members. But the *perception* of divergence may also be a result of a lack of shared understanding of what was meant by the "desire to work across polarized boundaries." For some, this includes working with competitors within a single sector (e.g. businesses), while others understood it to mean working across business, NGO, and civil society sectors in all projects. Some members felt that it was reasonable for some sectors to seek a safe place to work among

"We need to have greater diversity within the initiative teams so that we can look at initiatives through different lenses."

"I think cross-sector partnerships are essential and will underpin whatever impact SFL will have. Are those partnerships happening? It's spotty. There are places in SLF where it's beginning, and places where it hasn't any traction. It could be more powerful if the partnership process was fully imbedded. But it's true that private sector players need to get comfortable with each other before they can engage other sectors."

themselves—that “closing ranks” may be a necessary precursor to partnering with other sectors.

The Business Coalition in particular saw business-only membership as necessary to create sufficient safety to discuss the “thorny and risky” issues of businesses moving toward sustainability, and to attract competitors into the arena. Not all Business Coalition meetings have been business-only however, and Jason Clay from WWF was invited to share his ideas with the Business Coalition when they last met in January 2006.

The determination by the Business Coalition to invite only members from the business community resulted in a certain level of discord and suspicion among non-business sector Lab Members. The idea that market-driven system change might lack a commitment to decrease poverty or protect the environment underlies some of the NGO and public sector concern. For some Members of the Lab the cross-sectoral development of prototype initiatives was the vehicle for demonstrating an alternative approach to the problems inherent in a market driven economy.

At the same time, many Lab Members have articulated an understanding of the need for businesses to find the safety needed within the business group to align, bring competitors into the group, and explore how to enhance both margins and growth while embracing certification schemes and performance standards that increase the sustainability of all players in the food system.

Other Lab Members, however, fear that businesses might use membership in the Food Lab to project a commitment to sustainability that is not substantiated by their core business practices. The larger question that has emerged for the Business Coalition and the Food Lab is about how to maximize the benefits of the multi-stakeholder approach while honoring the needs of business and NGOs to meet in a safe space and to manage their public images.

Whether cross-continental exchange within the business sector will become part of the dialogue in the Business

Business Leader Members in the Food Lab comment on their experience of the Business Coalition projects:

“In my professional experience, I’ve never met with NGOs or tried to solve problems together with them. I started SFL with inherent distrust of NGOs and they of us, and at the first meeting, that was very apparent. But as you experience the process and talk about what’s really happening with these issues, my perception is that business is really doing something about it. But I also recognize that we can’t do it without the brainpower and help of the NGOs. My belief is that a mutual respect has grown.”

“BusCo[the Business Coalition] is about doing business. We need NGO involvement now, in the engineering phase. We need to create a road map of competitive transactions that increase sustainability. We are a think-tank for sustainable commerce, with best examples.”

“It’s pretty unusual that fierce competitors like SYSCO and U.S. Food Service can come together and work for the higher good. That’s what it’s all about. The essence, the power, of the SFL is that we can do 100 fold, 1,000 fold, more together than we can do by ourselves. What we’re doing is the right thing to do, the good thing to do—for the world. It’s also good for our businesses. There’s a competitive advantage for SYSCO to be involved,

Coalition also remains to be explored. U.S.-based and European-based businesses operate in very different contexts (i.e. political climate, consumer stance, trade rules). As a result, they have very different levels of engagement with the concept of sustainability and what it might mean in a business setting. European food businesses also have more opportunities than U.S.-based companies to collaborate with one another in such associations as the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) Platform and Eurogap. There have been explicit conversations about cross-Atlantic collaboration with the SAI Platform, and more such conversations are likely to happen at the Venture Meeting in New Orleans. Notwithstanding these questions, the Business Coalition is fulfilling an important need, as evidenced by the level of continuing interest in membership by both national and international food companies.

but we can't fully realize that competitive advantage without working together with others in this group to mainstream sustainability."

The Framing initiative is another example of relatively autonomous work. The research in Europe and the U.S. on dominant frameworks about food was not initially undertaken with much consultation from business, and the engagement of civil society organizations was purely advisory. Furthermore, the research in the U.S and Europe was essentially conducted in parallel rather than as a collaborative effort. This was necessitated by the constraints of the foundations in Europe and the U.S. which funded the work. The results of that relatively autonomous research are now being synthesized in phase two of this Initiative and will be diffused and further iterated by Lab Member organizations in the June 2006 Lab meeting.

The intensity of feeling articulated by Lab Members regarding the relationships within and between the various Initiatives is equaled only by the urgency and hope they express regarding the potential to shift the food system.

As noted in the Commodity Retreat, **holding tensions** is necessary for collaborative social change. At the heart of the discussions about single sector vs. multi-sector concerns are inevitable tensions between profit

"The arrival of big U.S. food companies and their championing of issues is very important. It's encouraging that they are still in SFL and want to make it work. It has required a huge shift for all sectors to work together. There's still a lot of distrust and uncertainty there. Overall, the power of SFL is that it affords a place for building

and sustainability. It is in these discussions that the “inherent trade-offs” take concrete shape and it is for that reason the potential for productive solutions is increased when the conversation involves stakeholders from different sectors.

Personal Change as a Strategy for Systemic Change

Many Lab Members view personal change as essential to the system change they are seeking, while others regard it as an unexpected bonus of involvement in the Food Lab. Exactly what is meant by personal change in this context is not universally shared, but for many it includes developing commitment, trust, determination, openness and curiosity. For others, personal change is more closely aligned with developing leadership skills for effecting change within their home institutions. And for many, personal change relates to learning—intellectually, conceptually, and experientially.

An aspect of personal change championed early in the Lab development was the importance of “presencing” or transforming oneself through the process of exploring creative solutions to intractable problems. Again, there are at least two perspectives on the practical manifestation of this concept. One perspective focuses on developing a personal connection to one’s deepest self and personal sense of mission. For many this deepening was an integral part of the solo retreats, for others it grows out of personal practices of reflection or mediation, and for still others it is inherent in doing work that “satisfies the soul” or contributes to a sense of hope for future generations. Another

relationships between sectors focused on achieving shared goals.”

Lab Member comments during or after the Mid-Course Review Meeting:

“It’s music to my ears to feel a sense that we will be impressed to make an exit out of our comfort zone. When do we, as individuals and as organizations, get out of our comfort zones? There seems to be an underlying belief here that we can change people by changing things. And I think it should be the other way around. I think that we need to change people who change things.”

“It is becoming clear to me that we need to change ourselves and our organizations first, if we want to even attempt to make significant changes in the food system.”

“Food systems are composed of people and what people do. Therefore, our change should focus on changing people who change things—not only standards and tools, but also on broader ‘people’ change”

“It is becoming clear to me that that individual change is occurring within the Food Lab group, but there remains a big gap between where we are and real, measurable manifestations of a shift in the food system.”

perspective views personal transformation as deepening one's personal understanding of the human consequences of the institutional policies that define the food system.

As the work of the Lab during this period centered increasingly on the prototyping initiatives, some members said they missed the personal, experiential elements of the earlier Lab experiences. There is, however, evidence that many Members of the Lab feel their participation has changed them. Many have called for the Lab to develop a cross-sectoral Leadership component to accelerate and intensify this aspect of the Lab experience.

The articulation of these many threads related to the importance of personal change in the Food Lab opens the way for a deeper exploration into the role of leadership in wider system change. Several Lab Members have expressed an assumption that individual leadership within institutions is essential to system change, just as visionary institutions are essential to shifting global policy and trade agreements. The role of individual and institutional leadership in creating the necessary conditions for system shift is emerging as one of several foci for the future work of the Food Lab.

"We need to change ourselves and our organizations first if we want to even attempt to make significant changes in the food system. We must address policy change and overall system change and understand our role in it. And the SFL is already making significant progress by changing people who participate in it."

"I thought it was going to be very interesting to bring a spiritual dimension into a business economic context, not a faith-based perspective, but a spiritual dimension in order to tap into the inner energy and courage that it's going to take to keep going. That's how I think we are going to tip the system."

"My major buy-in was the idea of focusing on how we can become stronger individual leaders to be able to really drive change. We all have so many barriers—all the things we see as the problem in the system itself, barriers in our companies, barriers amongst our colleagues and competitors— that just make it really difficult. We have to find the leadership to motivate. That's how I think we're going to tip the system."

The Impact of Relationships

A desirable aspect of a sustainable food supply chain identified in the Commodity Retreat was the principle of ***giving face to*** the human beings acting in the system. The value of personal relationship-building within the Lab is that it creates opportunities for individuals to experience the food system as a human system. The resulting potential is for changing the understanding of both the underlying problems and the necessary

solutions.

Many Lab Members have articulated the importance of the Food Lab for providing a circumscribed “safe space” for conversations between individuals and sectors in the food system that otherwise would not have occasion to interact. Out of those conversations relationships have developed that have led to experimentation, business agreements, consultations and projects. But while there are many impacts of relationships in the Lab which have spawned peripheral actions it is difficult to measure or confirm the degree to which relationship building contributes to the change the Lab is trying to affect.

The Food Lab offers a rare opportunity for substantial engagement across previously polarized boundaries. It is clear that a number of significant cross-sectoral projects have grown out of the personal relationships that have developed across unusual boundaries within the context of the Food Lab. Members from all sectors say this is the most valuable benefit of their participation in the Lab.

At the same time that concrete actions are enabled through personal relationships within the Lab Team, some members feel there is the limited support for deeper examination and debate of substantive differences between the strategies and perspectives of the member organizations. For these Members, the potential of cross-sector relationships, while real and valuable, has yet to be fully realized.

As with personal change, networking is emerging as a significant benefit of the Food Lab for some members and not for others. As the Lab moves toward evaluation of its work thus far, the role of personal relationships in creating large-scale change, and the potential for ongoing change represented by the relationships that have developed thus far, is well worth considering.

Lab Members responses to post-Costa Rica question, “What is becoming clear to you?”

“The SFL is worthless without the partnerships across sectors. I’d have no interest in SFL without that.”

“We maybe not on the same page, but at least we are reading the same book.”

“What’s the value of the SFL? It’s a safe place to explore ideas with people who have a different perspective than I do. I meet people that I wouldn’t otherwise and inevitably the ones I’m least likely to know otherwise are the ones who offer an incredible reality check or ideas that I would never have seen coming otherwise. The question is, can we continue that?”

“It is becoming clear to me that we need these kinds of spaces so that we can, collectively, find the will and the trust to do things differently.”

“The most impressive thing and the transformative power comes from working over days with people who think differently than you do. The diversity really was the key to insight.”

EVALUATION AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Producing measurable outcomes has always been a goal of the Sustainable Food Lab. As the final session of the Lab approaches in June 2006, members expect and need to be able to demonstrate the value of the Food Lab to their home institutions. There has been much discussion about how to accomplish this, and whether it is even possible to demonstrate significant food system change in any two-year project.

While it may be too early to judge the varying strategies being employed by different Food Lab Initiatives, the early outcomes indicate that the work of the Food Lab is having an impact on the food system—although measuring the breadth and depth of that impact will be an important part of assessing the effectiveness of the initiatives. Some, including Lab Advisor Peter Senge, believe that it will be many years before a full determination can be accomplished. At the same time, some Lab Members have expressed some urgency to assess the effectiveness of current efforts so that they can direct resources toward the work that offers the greatest potential to move the system toward sustainability. For most Lab Members the purpose of the assessment process is to satisfy their eagerness to learn from the experiments with innovation thus far.

Any assessment and evaluation of the Food Lab's work to date will have to take into account a number of limitations in the structure of the Lab which have become clear over time. For example not all links in the food chain are represented in the Lab membership, nor can the initiatives affect the system without significant diffusion and replication.

Assessment and Evaluation

The Costa Rica Mid-Course Review opened the evaluation phase of the Food Lab project. For the purposes of the secretariat and funders, an outside

Lab Member comments in the workshop evaluation for the Mid-Course Review:

“Sustainable Food Lab reflects the overly ambitious assumption about how fast change could occur. We had hoped to change the food industry in two years and found that we couldn't change some individuals in two years! Still, people can look at the food system through a new lens due to our work together. Implementation is a problem: it will take much longer than expected and require resources we don't yet have.”

“We were all told that it ends in June 2006. I know these things tend to build institutions that need to get fed. At the meetings in June, we'll need to understand the value of the SFL to move forward. What is the value proposition of SFLII?”

“It was hard to imagine how the U-Process was going to be operationalized at the community

evaluator has already begun to assess the process and outcomes of the Food Lab as a whole. For the purposes of the Lab Members themselves, informal assessments have included reflections on the process, concrete results, system shifts, and personal benefits from the Lab thus far. These assessments are varied and inconclusive, but nonetheless form part of the overall picture of the learning generated thus far.

There appears to be little consensus among Lab Members about the value of the U-Process. It is seen by some members as essential to the overall process, by others as important but imperfectly implemented, and by a few as altogether unnecessary.

Among those who see the process as valuable, several have already begun applying it in ventures beyond the Lab. One such venture is a mini-lab with convening partners in China. That group is in the process of planning a session in China in the fall of 2006 that is structured around an intensive two-week U-Process.

Among those who see the process as insufficient in some way, several Lab Members commented in meeting evaluation surveys that the process has not succeeded in overcoming polarization within the food system, even between the respective representatives of different sectors in the Lab.

Still others experience the U-Process as obscuring the very real and problematic differences between strategies, perspectives, and goals of Members of the Lab. For these Members, the U-Process incorporated methods that “reasonable people do naturally” and some of the presencing work alienated them because of the perceived “spiritual” aspects. These members say that although the process did avoid conflict within the team, it has not allowed for substantive engagement of the very divisive differences that polarize the food system.

Beyond assessments of the U-Process, the ability of the Lab to achieve significant system shift is clearly a

level. There’s a tension: we talk about ‘global’ a lot with food systems, but things need to happen at the local level to put things into practice. There wasn’t enough thought put into how to create critical mass at local levels to satisfy SFL’s larger goals.”

“The U-Process has not overcome the need to engage multiple sectors on an equal footing—to understand what each sector brings and that they need each other.”

“I have a lot of sympathy with what is involved in the U-Process, what’s behind it. Where values and interests are so diverse, like in my home organization, you need to approach problems through values perspectives to achieve cooperation. But the balance has not been struck at a good point. We put more priority on the process than on the substance. We really need to be talking about the substance of food system issues.”

“Up until [the last day in Costa Rica] I had been seeing the U-Process as this annoying, touchy-feely thing that we had to endure as the way that this group was being facilitated. What I realized was how it had affected me and that I wanted more. It’s tough, particularly for U.S. companies that have no regard for personal development as a vehicle for enhancing corporate performance, to grasp this powerful concept and get committed to it.”

“What is the problem in simple terms? I look at the objectives and

measure of success for members. There is abundant evidence that measures of effectiveness vary widely and substantively within the member institutions of the Lab. As previously noted, it is even less possible to measure the impacts of relationships and personal change.

Assessment of the effectiveness of the Lab may be further complicated by lack of a single, cohesive strategy for system change. The strategies aimed at long-term change through standards and public messaging for example, may prove harder to assess than the projects designed to harvest “low hanging fruit” and demonstrate the Lab’s capacity to achieve short-term results.

For some Lab Members and many outside the circles of membership, resolving differences would be a measure of success—differences of strategy, of definitions (of such terms as “sustainability,” growth, and sufficiency), and the differences growing out of the NGO and business needs and perspectives in the system. A consensus has not developed regarding the degree of tension and difference which is creative and that which needs resolution before joint action can be successful.

Despite these frequently expressed desires for hard conversations and resolution, for many members comfort with differences appears to increase with the length of involvement in the Lab and the degree of concrete work being done. Lab Members who have been involved the longest and thereby have developed relationships and commitment to the purposes of the Lab feel less urgency around reaching agreement among all members of the Lab on a single strategy, a single definition, or a single measure for success. Members who have joined in recent months, or who are less involved in the work of the initiative teams, are frequently the ones expressing the need for more focus, more agreement, and more enforceable policy level agreements.

they are brave, we all agree on that. Will we change things in 2006? No, this will take 20 years, 40 years, 80 years, and new people will be here after we are gone. But these objectives have to be maintained, and that is our work here: to find ways to have the lab survive after June 2006. We live in a world with demands; we meet these demands in projects in the making on the road. We should not abandon the initiatives that are part of the future that we are about to be part of.”

“We had never thought about working with the enterprise sector before. They are suddenly more open. I am talking with [a business member of the Food Lab about their policies marketing unsustainable products]. It was not possible for me to imagine a relationship like this with a business or enterprise before.”

Food Lab Initiative Assessment

Using the supply chain projects as its starting point, the Lab is in the process of creating an evaluation and sharing protocol that all initiatives will use as a minimum standard for building collective learning about how to change the food system.

In the Business Coalition, the Latin American Small Farmer Group, and other subgroups, there are a number of emerging projects focused on making supply chains more sustainable. Some of these projects have an explicit NGO research and assessment component, while others are direct business-to-business projects. The nature of the change work and the goals for each project differ, but there is an opportunity to take advantage of the diversity of these efforts and be intentional about sharing the learnings with the rest of Food Lab.

This is particularly important for the supply chain projects of which there are approximately ten budding initiatives, each with the potential to inform the others and build a body of knowledge specific to supply chain work. The evaluation and sharing protocol under development includes consistent metrics through which to assess each supply chain project, as well as a written report detailing the goals, indicators, baseline against which progress is measured, innovation testing, the degree to which the work draws on existing Food Lab knowledge base, the lessons learned, and the barriers encountered.

Building a body of collective learning about system change by using assessment tools is relevant also to work beyond the supply chain projects. The work of the Framing Initiative, for example, is intended to affect the food system through a diffusion strategy. The results of this Initiative will be used not only by the foundations sponsoring the work but also within the Food Lab member organizations. The number of Lab Member organizations that use its research and communication tools in their own messaging campaigns will determine

Lab Member email comment describing the usefulness of the supply chain work:

“What would you hope to be learning from other supply chain efforts? What works and what didn’t - what changed and why it’s important to go one way rather than another. For example, if the goal is to get more capital to the grower, how does one best do that? If the goal is to improve the water quality, how do you do that? Hopefully, over time people will pick a supply chain and determine they want to try to affect ‘x’ and then they can go to this analysis[of our work] and see if anyone tried working on ‘x’ and get some guidance.”

“There’s a need to clarify the links throughout the system, making the interdependencies visible. There is the need for clarity and clear robust metrics that underpin these changes that we need to affect.”

the effectiveness of the Framing Initiative.

Shaping the Future

As the value of continuing the work of the Sustainable Food Lab beyond the formal end of the project in June 2006 became clear to many in the Lab, they saw a benefit in the creation of a Steering Committee composed of current Lab Members. The Steering Committee convened at the Costa Rica session and created a preliminary plan for the coming year.

High on their list of issues to address was to articulate the collective vision of the Food Lab, to define what it means to be a member of the Lab, and to review the budget. The vision they developed was the first to be articulated by the Members rather than put forward by the conveners of the Lab:

The purpose of the Sustainable Food Lab is to make a significant contribution to the continuity of world food supply by generating among key opinion leaders and decision makers profound understanding of the global food system and its sustainability, underscored by a number of successful interventions (“living examples”) at the level of standards, supply chain and demand pull.

Steering Committee Member
comments during first meeting in
Costa Rica:

In addition to assessing the current status of the Food Lab, the Steering Committee has committed to addressing the following issues:

- Shape Phase II, including developing the Value Proposition of the Lab going forward
- Strategize how to maximize synergies between Initiatives
- Define membership
- Develop criteria for determining who to invite into the Lab before June 2006
- Articulate the relationship of Executive Champions to Lab and decision making

“Where does the theory relate to actually benefiting real people? We’ve learned that it’s much difficult to implement than to theorize.”

The formation of the Steering Committee marks a significant shift in the relationship of the Members to the Food Lab, indicating a greater ownership of the

work as it moves forward. How this shift affects the Lab and why it transpired at this particular point in the process will be part of the ongoing reflection on the Sustainable Food Lab.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Origins

The Sustainable Food Laboratory arose from a growing awareness of the critical nature of the economic, environmental, social, and political impacts of global food systems. There is an emerging recognition in all sectors of the food chain that humanity has yet to develop an optimal global system of food production and distribution. The Food Lab is a forum for leaders across the system to address the most pressing and significant problems of food and agriculture.

The Food Lab had its origins in the summer of 2002 at the launch of the Global Leadership Initiative, an initiative dedicated to addressing the critical global challenges of our time. Over breakfast at that gathering Hal Hamilton, Don Seville, Adam Kahane, and Peter Senge started exploring the possibility that the polarized debates over agricultural sustainability might benefit from the application of the Global Leadership Initiative's U-Process, which offers a process to foster breakthrough thinking and action on complex, cross-sector problems. The conversation then expanded to include Andre van Heemstra, Jan-Kees Vis and Jeroen Bordewijk of Unilever and Oran Hesterman of the Kellogg Foundation. Oran, Jan-Kees and Jeroen described their ongoing investments in sustainable agriculture projects and their desire to influence the mainstream, but all three expressed a sense that neither the Kellogg Foundation nor Unilever are powerful enough to do this alone.

Over the succeeding year and a half, Hal, Adam, and their colleagues at Sustainability Institute and Generon Consulting interviewed dozens of system leaders in the

Adam Kahane comments in pre-workshop interview:

“We envision that this team will be able not only to imagine breakthrough solutions but to implement them. In doing so, they will demonstrate that it is possible for humans to address serious global, vital, complex problem situations, and to do so peacefully, not by force.”

Hal Hamilton comments in pre-workshop interview:

“This project for me is full of hope. I have no sense of just what this group will do, but I am eager for us all to take on the most difficult things we can.”

Comments in pre-workshop interviews:

“You need the synergy of thinkers. I think it is impossible that only one small team can find answers.”

United States, Europe and Brazil. From these interviews, individuals were invited to join the Food Lab. The intention was to bring together entrepreneurial leaders seeking more rapid and far-reaching change in the direction of sustainability than their current efforts had achieved. The hope was that bringing together representatives from each sector of the food chain could provide a unique picture of the complexity and critical nature of the problems intrinsic in the system as a whole.

In conversations and interviews conducted over the course of assembling the Lab Team and Executive Champions, interviewees identified a variety of **systemic challenges** that the project needs to address:

- Increasing productivity while stewarding biodiversity and reducing energy use
- Enabling mass markets to incorporate environmental and social impacts of particular food production
- Enlarging market access for developing countries while preserving the future for farmers in the United States and Europe
- Protecting the health of farmers and farm workers
- Increasing opportunities for the rural poor
- Enabling smaller farmers to aggregate supply and achieve efficiencies of scale
- Attracting talent and entrepreneurship to food production
- Enabling a richer flow of information among all the nodes in value chains, including farmers, food businesses and consumers

Team members set the stage for the Foundation Workshop by identifying these systemic challenges and

“We should ask is: ‘What do we want as farmer, trader, processor, consumer and human being? How can we achieve together what we want from the system we create together?’”

“There might be some possibility of creating almost an alchemical reaction with this group so that we can figure the value chain differently and interact differently.”

“Can mass markets in reality incorporate quality, including landscape and culture, in a way that is even close to what is achieved in Europe with a [regional quality] approach?”

“We’re trying to do something that’s beyond what anyone can do by simply reacting within their own institution, and that’s the basis for this project: that people from three continents and all this effort can really find a solution or solutions and ideas for a

by calling for new ways to think about solutions. They frequently mentioned the need to move beyond polarization and debate in regard to these challenges, as well as the need to develop solutions across perceived boundaries.

Purpose

Incorporating the advice and experience from many interviews and meetings, the Sustainable Food Lab was launched with the purpose of making mainstream food systems more sustainable. The Lab brings together leaders from businesses, governments, farm groups and non-governmental organizations with this explicit focus. Although a more sustainable food system is at the heart of this work, the group realizes that perspectives on what it means to be sustainable differ substantially among the institutions, businesses, and organizations represented in the Lab. One of the challenges for the Lab Team is to use these differing perspectives and priorities as a catalyst for shared learning and significant innovations in the system.

The focus of the Food Lab is expressed by many team members and Executive Champions as making change “on the ground” through practical action, pilot projects and viable full-scale food system interventions. The objective of the Lab is to create prototypes of innovations that, once piloted and scaled up, will either support the development of or directly produce sustainable food supply systems that are large, mainstream, and value-producing for all actors in the chain—not only small, niche, or philanthropic.

The Foundation Workshop, held in Bergen in June 2004, focused on developing a collective understanding of the current reality of food systems. Subsequently Learning Journeys were designed to develop a shared understanding of the highly complex food system. During the Learning Journeys, talking, listening and

more sustainable food supply.”

Team Member comments:

“I am interested in the outcomes that people have stated repeatedly in terms of getting some kind of shared understanding of definition, getting some projects that are really about scaleable mainstreaming, and also having new ideas generated that come from the interaction of different points of view and working at the margins –these things are really critical for all of us.”

“I think it’s a big chance for me to learn a lot, also for us to build concrete projects and make concrete aims for what shall happen – not only to talk, [but] to build something.”

Lab Team member comments in opening workshop plenary:

“We’ve been in the last 20 years through a lot of pilot projects, a lot of meetings, and I was really attracted to this because of the verb ‘to do.’ Apparently our group using this process will do something.”

Team Member comments:

“We are here because we would like to have this food of higher quality with competitive price [while] defending the environment and the social culture.”

learning to observe in a distinctive way laid the groundwork for experiencing with new lenses the dilemmas, potentials, and dynamics at work in the food system.

The five-day Innovation Retreat in the U.S included a 48-hour wilderness solo experience designed help team members uncover their deeper knowing about both what is going on in the system and what they, individually and collectively, need to do about it. After the wilderness solo, the plenary work of the Lab Team culminated in team agreement to pursue five Innovation Initiative projects and two Exploratory Initiatives, thus launching the third phase of the U-Process: the co-creating phase (see Learning History, Chapter Two).

The four day Design Studio in Salzburg, Austria focused on furthering the work of the five Initiatives through both intensive work on rapid cycle prototyping as well as cross-initiative critique and commentary (see Learning History, Chapter Three).

Who

The original Lab Team is composed of individuals from three continents and multiple sectors in the food system. The founding Lab Team consists of people with a demonstrated ability to make change on the ground and who have expressed a high level of frustration about the current state of the system. They embody a wide range of experience and expertise, including global and regional policy development and implementation, product development and certification, regional branding of products, developing farmer cooperatives, integrating and advocating for environmental and social policies, and developing financial incentive programs addressing many dimensions of food systems.

Three principal groups support the work of the Lab Team: Executive Champions, Advisors, and the Secretariat. The Executive Champions are chief executives or senior officers of the companies and organizations with which team members are affiliated.

“What stands out is that we lack a framework and common definition of what a sustainable, active food system is. There’s not a common understanding among the stakeholders of sustainable food production. I think we still need to look for that baseline, that common definition of understanding and agreement. What is our view on mainstream, sustainable, agri-food systems?”

Team Member comments:

“The problem, historically, with alternatives in the food industry is we [business] will create a strategy and it’s separate – it’s very insular from the policy people and from the people who are working on hunger/poverty, the NGO community. This project provides an opportunity for us to integrate our efforts so that we have a more powerful and focused strategy.”

Executive Champions addressing the Sustainable Food Lab:

“A healthy company can only remain

These Champions provide feedback, credibility, and support for mobilizing further resources as Food Lab projects take shape.

The Advisors are resource persons. They are experts who provide advice, research support, or intellectual input to the Lab Team.

The Secretariat is the professional support for the Lab and was provided initially by Sustainability Institute and Generon Consulting. Sustainability Institute (SI) is a non-profit research and consulting group that uses systems analysis and organizational learning to help a broad array of organizations become more strategic. Generon is an international process-consulting firm with extensive experience in tri-sector dialogue and action.

Following the Innovation Retreat, Synergos Institute joined the Secretariat in providing professional support for the work of the Food Lab. Synergos is an international NGO that supports local development and philanthropy with projects in North America, Asia, Latin America and Southern Africa.

For the Design Studio in Salzburg the Idea Factory joined the secretariat focusing on the rapid cycle prototyping process.

How

The design of this Lab is based on the U-Process, a method for deep innovation that has been developed and applied over the last 20 years by a group of action researchers now associated with the Global Leadership Initiative. In his welcoming statement at the Foundation Workshop, Adam Kahane characterized the U-Process as having three phases: co-sensing, co-presencing and co-creating. The first workshop focused primarily on the *co-sensing* phase—that of exploring the varied perspectives and priorities within the team in order to understand the complexity of current reality in the food system. The *co-presencing* phase—that of

healthy if it operates in healthy communities within a healthy environment. Why is sustainability of agriculture so important to us and why have we picked this particular topic? Well, over two-thirds of our base of our profits is agricultural.”

“Credibility is a key word in this type of project, specifically credibility of the process and credibility of the outcome. We have enormous confidence in the people who are behind this project in terms of credibility of the process, and you are the guarantee of the credibility of the outcome. If all of you are happy with what comes out of it, it must be a major success.”

Adam Kahane:

“If we already knew the solution, then we wouldn’t need any of this. We would simply move from where we are to where we want to be. Many of you have tried to do that and you’re here because there’s something you’re trying to do that’s beyond what you can do by simply reacting within your own institutions. That’s

seeing what sense can be made of the complexity of the system, was introduced in the Innovation Retreat. The *co-creating* phase, in which the group understanding and work coalesce into practical initiatives, is the basis for the final two chapters of the Food Lab History.

Although they are described here as distinct, in practice the co-sensing, co-presencing and co-creating phases of the Food Lab overlap with each other and take place in mini-cycles throughout and between each workshop.

The problems in the food system, as in any complex system, exhibit high *dynamic, social, and generative complexity*.

Dynamic complexity occurs when cause and effect are separated in space and time. For example, consumer taste in Belgium impacts coffee production in Guatemala, and determinations about land tenure and agricultural practices made 20 years ago affect current opportunities.

Generative complexity occurs when the situation itself is fundamentally unfamiliar. Old solutions may no longer be useful in our age of globalization, with its new technology, new communications, and new networks. In an unfamiliar situation, using the best practices from the past won't necessarily solve current problems.

Finally, high *social complexity* is evident when influential people in the system have fundamentally different views of what is going on, and about what matters. When addressing such situations, the participation of diverse stakeholders makes possible a comprehensive understanding of current reality and allows the group to identify significant leverage points for change.

It is within the context of dynamic, generative and high social complexity that the Food Lab engages an influential microcosm of the food system in the first two-years of the Sustainable Food Lab Project.

the simple basis for this project: to bring together people from different parts of the system to try to understand the current reality and bring forward a new one."

Adam Kahane:

"We talk about deeper levels of response, changing the structure of the system, redesigning the system, changing how we think about the system...and ultimately that is the purpose of what we're doing."

Appendix A

Sustainable Food Laboratory Partners

(as of December 1, 2005)

Executive Champions

Lawrence Benjamin, CEO, **US Foodservice**, United States
Antony Burgmans (alternates: Jeroen Bordewijk, Andre van Heemstra), Chairman, **Unilever**, Netherlands
Pierre Calame, President, **Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation**, France
Wout Dekker, CEO and Chairman, **Nutreco**, the Netherlands
Richard Foster, Vice-President, **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**, United States
Luiz Gonzago Murat, Chief Financial Officer, and Gilberto Tomazoni, CEO, **Sadia**, Brazil
Kurt Hoffman, President, **Shell Foundation**, United Kingdom
Bart Jan Krouwel, Managing Director, Sustainability and Social Innovation, **Rabobank**, the Netherlands
John Machuzick, Senior Vice President, **General Mills**, United States
Joost Martens, Regional Director, Mexico and Caribbean, **Oxfam GB**
Steven McCormick, President and Chief Executive Officer, **The Nature Conservancy**, United States
Eugenio Peixoto, Secretary of Agrarian Reorganization, **Ministry of Agrarian Development**, Brazil
Gerrit Rauws, Director, **King Baudouin Foundation**, Belgium
Mark Ritchie, President, **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**, United States
Bob Dunn, President, **The Synergos Institute**, United States
Richard Schnieders, CEO, **SYSCO**, United States
Paul Trần Van Thinh, Former Ambassador of the **European Union** to the World Trade Organization
Roland Vaxelaire (alternate: Thierry Legault), Director of Quality and Sustainable Development,
Carrefour, France

Lab Team Members

Luba Abrams, Senior Director of Segment Marketing, **US Foodservice**, United States
Johan Alleman, Program Officer, **King Baudouin Foundation**, Belgium
Axel Aubrun, Principal, **Cultural Logic**, United States
Pedro Alfredo Avendaño Garcés, Executive Director, **World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers**, Canada
Daniel Bernier, Executive Assistant and Policy Adviser to Belinda Stronach, Member of the **Parliament of Canada**
Sylvia Blanchet, co-founder, **ForesTrade**, United States
Arthur Bogason, Chairman, **National Association of Small Boat Owners**, Iceland
Jacques Botault, Mayor, **Second District of Paris**, France
Arie van den Brand, Director, **In Natura**, former **Member of Parliament**, the Netherlands
Bertil Buysse, Operations Director, **Fjord Seafood Europe**, Belgium
Pedro de Camargo Neto, **Sociedade Rural Brasileira**, Brazil
João S. Campari, Director, **The Nature Conservancy**, Brazil
Aileen Carrell, Manager Green Coffee Sustainability and Operations, **Starbucks**, United States
Anthony Cavalieri, **The Nature Conservancy**, United States
Juan Cheaz Paleaz, Regional Policy Coordinator for Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, **Oxfam GB**, the Dominican Republic
Jason Clay, President, Center for Conservation Innovation, **World Wildlife Fund**, United States
Luiz Coirollo, Senior Specialist, **World Bank**, Brazil
Meire de Fatima Ferreira, Coordinator for Sustainability, **Sadia**, Brazil

Daniel Debomy, Managing Director, **OPTEM**, France
 Osler Desouzart, Consultant, formerly with **Sadia, Perdigão** and **Doux Frangosul**, Brazil
 Mark Eckstein, (former) Environment and Social Development Department, **International Finance Corporation**, United States
 Alberto Ercilio Broch, **National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag)**, Brazil
 Ed Flanagan, President and CEO, **Jasper Wyman**, United States
 Sheri Flies, Corporate Counsel, **Costco Wholesale Corporation**, United States
 Laura Freeman, President and CEO, **Laura's Lean Beef**, United States
 Thomas Fricke, co-founder, **ForesTrade**, United States
 Gilles Gaebel, Fresh Food Development, **Carrefour**, France
 John Goldstein, Senior Managing Director, **Medley Global Advisors**, United States
 Joe Grady, Principal, **Cultural Logic**, United States
 Rosalinda Guillen, former farm worker and leader in the **farm worker movement**, United States
 Charles Hallock, Managing Director, **Rabobank** International, NY, Industry Specialist Grains and Oilseeds, United States.
 Jamie Harvie, Director Healthy Food and Health Care Project, **Health Care Without Harm**, Executive Director, Institute for Sustainable Food, United States
 Pierre Hauselmann, **The Ethical Certification and Labeling Space**, Switzerland
 Oran Hesterman, Program Director, **W. K. Kellogg Foundation**, United States
 Sharna Jarvis, Programme Manager, Sustainable Communities Programme, **Shell Foundation**, United Kingdom
 Eugene Kahn, Vice-President for Sustainability, **General Mills**, United States
 Henrik Karup Jorgensen, Managing Director, **Royal Greenland**
 Carlos Klink, Team Leader, Agriculture, **The Nature Conservancy**, Brazil
 Panayotis Lebessis, Economic Analysis and Evaluation, DG Agriculture of the **European Commission**
 Karen Lehman, **The Minnesota Project/Adaptive Leadership**, United States
 Mark Lundy, Senior Research Fellow, Rural Agroenterprise Development Project, **International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)**, Colombia
 Theresa Marquez, Marketing Director, **Organic Valley Cooperative**, United States
 Erik Mathijs, Associate Professor, Agricultural and Food Economics, **Catholic University Leuven**, Belgium
 Alberto Monterroso Morales, President, **Commercializadora Aj Ticonel**, Guatemala
 Neyde Nóbrega Nery, Executive Director, **Assocene - Associação de Orientação das Cooperativas do Nordeste**, Brazil
 Frank van Ooijen, Public Affairs and Corporate Communications Director, **Nutreco**, the Netherlands
 Henk van Oosten, Staff Member, Innovation Network, **Ministry of Agriculture**, the Netherlands
 Frederick Payton, Executive Director, **AgroFrontera**, Dominican Republic
 Clive Peckham, Director, **AlimenTerra**, United Kingdom
 Bjarne Pedersen, Principal Policy Officer, **Consumers International**, United Kingdom
 Larry Pulliam, Senior Vice President, **SYSCO**, United States
 Carlos Rodriquez, Agronomist, **Starbucks**, Costa Rica
 Elena Saraceno, Policy Advisor to the President, **European Commission**, Belgium
 Peggy Sechrist, Texas farmer, President, **Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group**, United States
 Bill Shepard, Principal, **Robin Hood Center**, USA
 Sandra Taylor, Senior Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility, **Starbucks**, United States
 Bruce Tozer, Former Managing Director, Structured Trade and Commodity Finance, **Rabobank International**, United Kingdom
 John Turenne, President, **Sustainable Food Systems**, formerly, Yale/Aramark chef, United States

Carlos Vargas Galvez, Market Access Program Coordinator for Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean, **Oxfam GB**, El Salvador
Pierre Verreault, Coordinator, Human Resources Projects, **Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters**
Orn Vidar Skulason, Vice President, Marketing and Sales, **SIF Group**, Iceland
Marcelo Vieira, farmer and board member, **Brazil Specialty Coffee Association** and **Brazilian Rural Society**, Brazil
Jan Kees Vis, Sustainable Agriculture Manager, **Unilever**, the Netherlands
Bernd Voss, Vice President, **Working Group on Rural Agriculture**, Germany
Pierre Vuarin, Program Director, **Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation**, France
Craig Watson, Vice President, Quality Assurance and Agricultural Sustainability, **SYSCO**, United States
Ali Webb, Communications Manager for Leadership, Food Systems, and Rural Development Programming, **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**, United States
Tensi Whelan, Executive Director, **Rainforest Alliance**, United States
Paul Winter, Trust Catering Manager, **South London and Maudsley NHS Trust**, United Kingdom
Casper van Zijl, Sustainability Officer, **Royal Ahold**, the Netherlands

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Susan Sweitzer, Learning History and Initiative Manager
Zaid Hassan, Process Documentation
John Heller, Administration
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Supporters

In-kind support has been provided by all of the participating organizations. Additional financial support has been provided by:

Carrefour
Costco
Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation
ForesTrade
General Mills
Jasper Wyman
King Baudouin Foundation
Ministry of Agrarian Development of Brazil
Ministry of Agriculture of the Netherlands
Nutreco
Organic Valley Cooperative
RA Hunt Foundation
Rabobank

Sadia
Shell Foundation
SYSCO
Unilever
U.S. Foodservice
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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