



The Importance of Community Collaboration to Support Sustainable Agriculture



Rainbow Research Inc.



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Introduction

For a community or an individual to support sustainable agriculture, it may seem as though a first step is to create or select a definition of what is meant by “sustainable agriculture”. Many definitions and explanations of “sustainable,” “alternative,” “regenerative,” and “low-input” agriculture can be found in the literature (e.g., Francis, 1988; National Research Council, 1989; Harwood, 1990; Ruttan, 1988; McRae et al, 1989; Lockeretz, 1988; Knezek et al, 1988; Hesterman and Thorburn, 1994). Most agree that for an agricultural system to be sustainable, it must have characteristics such as resource efficiency, an acceptable level of productivity and profitability, and adequate environmental protection. Others state the case that sustainability must also incorporate social issues such as support of rural communities and concern about agricultural policy and research (Altieri, 1988). Starting in 1990, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) decided, along with other societal institutions that were attempting to foster a more sustainable agricultural system in the USA, to support community-based efforts in sustainable agriculture. This initiative at WKKF has come to be known as Integrated Farming Systems (IFS). The IFS Initiative is now at its midpoint, in terms of WKKF funding commitment, and important lessons are starting to emerge. This paper describes the conceptual framework of IFS, presents the reasoning behind the importance of community collaboration in furthering sustainable agricultural systems, and, based on experience from the 18 IFS projects throughout the USA, presents seven essential ingredients of successful community collaboration. The paper concludes with a set of questions about whether the lessons learned from 18 projects based in the USA have applicability to sustainable agriculture efforts in other countries and cultures.

Integrated Farming Systems Evolution

One of the first tasks in creating the IFS Initiative was to build a conceptual model of what was meant by sustainable agriculture and IFS so there would be a basis from which to start our grantmaking activities. Our first inclination was either to choose one of the many definitions of sustainable agriculture that could be found, or to create our own definition. We resisted that inclination, and decided not to define sustainable agriculture or IFS. The reason not to create or use a definition was that if a definition was chosen, no matter what it was, the next five years might be spent around a discussion of that definition. We were much more interested in creating and catalyzing activity towards change in the direction of sustainability rather than engaging in discussions about the definition. The decision not to define sustainable agriculture or IFS, and instead to consider sustainability as an evolution, has helped tremendously in assisting those throughout the USA who are attempting to catalyze change towards more sustainable agriculture.

Over the past 50 years in most developed countries, agricultural systems and the research, education, and policy infrastructure to support them have been based on characteristics such as high yields, monoculture, and specialization (Fig. 1). This could be considered the “conventional” agricultural system. As the system evolves toward a higher degree of integration or toward more sustainability, additional characteristics are included (e.g., crop rotation replacing monoculture). As the system continues to evolve, characteristics appear like conservation and integrated pest management. Now the concern is not only about what is happening in that field in the year that the crop is growing, but also about the impact that farming practice is having on the surrounding environment. With this concern, other kinds of farming practices are incorporated, like using cover crops as a source of nitrogen rather than synthetic fertilizer. At higher levels of system evolution, we find characteristics like building farmer networks (so information exchange can occur more easily), leadership (to tie farming practices into the larger community), diversity (of thought, opinion, and people), and the impact that public policy has on the farm and community. One important point in this evolution from conventional to more integrated or sustainable systems is that many of the characteristics that appear in the conventional system remain throughout the evolution, but the context surrounding those characteristics changes. For example, high yields and profitability are as important in a sustainable system as in a more conventional system; the difference is that these are achieved within a much different context that includes considerations all the way from the field on the farm, to the family, to the community, to the environment, and even to national policy.

This IFS evolution is used as the conceptual underpinning of our work in sustainable agriculture at WKKF and with grantee projects across the USA. Using this evolution

rather than a definition precludes a requirement that we have a particular set of practices in mind that we “enshrine” as sustainable. Rather, it provides a context so no matter where any particular farm or farming community resides in this evolution, there is always room for movement toward more sustainability. Catalyzing change is always possible.

In addition to, or possibly because of, the lack of integration in conventional farming systems, these systems tend to be associated with problems such as loss of valuable topsoil, contamination of surface and groundwater with fertilizers and pesticides, and lack of profitability for farmers. There is growing concern for the health and safety of a food supply system that relies heavily on agri-chemicals and for the health and safety of farmers and farm workers who are exposed to these toxic chemicals. Additional troublesome trends include decreases in farm and rural population, the lack of opportunities for young and entry-level farmers, and the economic and social demise of many rural communities. The IFS concept is WKKF’s response to the challenge of change in our agricultural systems. Achieving a sustainable agriculture will require integrated farming systems that involve many diverse individuals and institutions in rural communities.

The IFS evolution suggests a vision of an agriculture that:

- uses resources efficiently
- protects the environment and conserves non-renewable resources
- safeguards the health of farmers, their families, and farm workers
- sustains vigorous, healthy rural communities
- provides opportunities for a decent standard of living and high quality of life for farm families
- produces plentiful, nutritious, affordable food and fiber

Most thoughtful individuals, both within and outside the agricultural professions, would agree that it would benefit society to incorporate the above-mentioned concepts of IFS into our current farming practices. The question must therefore be asked: What is preventing this from occurring? ; or at least: What is preventing this from occurring at a more rapid pace? One way to address this question is to consider the barriers that exist to the adoption of more sustainable farming systems.

- There are *technical* barriers, such as how to manage weeds with reduced herbicide inputs, how to provide nutrient needs if less fertilizer is used, and how to assess the environment impacts of alternative nutrient sources.

- There are *policy* and *economic* barriers, such as constraints imposed by national agricultural policies and the lack of markets for products identified as sustainably produced.
- There are *institutional* barriers, such as disincentives in the public sector to engage in the types of research and education that are required, and an excessive institutional focus on technology rather than on the process of change.
- There are also barriers in the *personal attitudes* of those individuals who are reluctant to change their farming practices. The barriers include a perception that implementing more sustainable practices will result in greater demands on their time and skill, or a fear that it would be too risky to attempt the necessary changes.

Why a Collaborative Approach?

Previous and ongoing projects in sustainable agriculture, especially those directed by agronomists, horticulturists, or other technical specialists, include efforts to develop and test new technologies that hold the promise of maintaining agricultural productivity while protecting the environment. These projects often focus on disseminating results of such technologies to a broader farm audience with the hopes that more farmers would adopt sustainable practices. There has been relatively little emphasis on the human factors that play a critical role in adoption of new practices. The WKKF believes that many agricultural problems in rural communities in the USA are actually human challenges that cannot be successfully addressed solely with technical solutions. The change effort towards higher sustainability requires addressing a comprehensive set of barriers, and previous experience has taught us that addressing only a single barrier at any one time has limited impact.

This is one reason that priority is given to projects that create the kind of dynamic collaborations within which farm families, farm businesses, and rural communities can address the challenges facing them. Priority has been given to funding projects that (i) develop, test, and validate technologies that support the development of more resource-efficient, integrated farming systems; (ii) include an innovate educational component to promote adoption of these technologies; (iii) explicitly address the challenge of enabling effective communication and responsible decision-making among stakeholders in our agricultural communities; and (iv) formulate a strategy to develop leadership capacity within farm families and businesses and then

use that leadership to shape the dialogue between farmers and ranchers and the nonfarm members of the community. Projects are not limited to challenges facing production agricultural per se. One of the most critical barriers to adoption of more sustainable food production systems is the lack of opportunity to market food produced on the farm at a reasonable profit. In recognition of this situation, projects may also address the need for enhancing rural economic development activities such as increasing the opportunities for adding value to goods produced either on farms or the community.

By embracing a more comprehensive approach to solving problems in our current agricultural systems, WKKF is creating the potential for all the stakeholders in the system to be involved in farming the issues and envisioning creative solutions. Such solutions will be more fully supported within rural communities and at the institutions with which they interact. The working definition of “community” in the context of this program may be a geographically contiguous area such as a township, county, or state. Community may also be defined more broadly as a community of identity or affinity, such as a group of people whose endeavors contribute to, or who are affected by, agricultural production systems or where people experience a sense of belonging. Although institutions such as universities and state agencies may not be considered part of a geographically contiguous community, it is important to include these institutions and their resources in developing and carrying out IFS projects, because these institutions channel a great share of public resources to serve public purpose.

It is critical that collaboration be established with communities and not just among institutions. This is both because several of the barriers to sustainability reside within the community and because solutions to many of the challenges facing agriculture will be found in the knowledge and practice at the community level. Communities have the capacity to catalyze policy and institutional change. It is citizen power or community power that can create both the pressure for policy and institutional change and the space and new models into which policies and institutions can move. Systems change is caused by leaders for change both within and outside the institutions. The premise of the IFS Initiative — which has been supported by the IFS experience so far — is that change will be more rapid and far-reaching when change agents within and outside work synergistically.

Another reason that it is important to collaborate with community is that mainstream institutions can't be relied upon as the sole or primary engine for systems change because they are major beneficiaries of — or at least closely associated with the major beneficiaries of — the current system. Just as the current system rewards monoculture and specialization, so do the most successful practitioners of monoculture and specialization reward current institutions and try to

maintain control over the resources in those institutions, so that those institutions serve their interests.

The IFS Projects

The primary goal of the IFS Initiative is to help people overcome the barriers to adopting sustainable agricultural systems. The IFS Initiative includes 18 community-based projects that are addressing critical technical and economic barriers that impede the adoption of more sustainable production systems. These projects also focus on the less tangible institutional, policy, and social barriers. The IFS Initiative creates models that bring together the knowledge, policy, and practices of academic institutions, government agencies, and organizations at the community level. The 18 IFS projects are true collaborations working together in a comprehensive manner. Each project has a science-based agricultural institution as a partner; includes farm-level demonstrations that test integrated practices that are economically and environmentally sustainable over time; represents a major bio-region of the USA; and focuses on the most significant commercial agriculture located in the region. Special attention has been given to including populations within the food system that have been traditionally underrepresented and underserved.

Through a structure that networks these projects (networking conferences are held twice each year) and through intensive efforts at evaluation across projects, important lessons are being learned about the essential ingredients that seem necessary for community collaboration to be an effective change strategy in agriculture.

Essential Ingredients of Community Collaboration

- 1. To stimulate innovation and change in farming practices, build community around sustainable farmers.**

As farmers find themselves part of a group (part of a community) that cares about finding (establishing) a farming system that is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable, they find examples, mentors, encouragement, support to try new practices and systems. Farmers learn especially from their own experience and from other farmers. Reducing isolation and competition among farmers, and nurturing friendship and increased sharing

of information and experience -- in other words, helping them join or build a community of learners and pioneers for greater sustainability -- will accelerate what they learn through these two primary channels.

“Build community” means: nurture the formation of groups and relationships within which people experience a sense of belonging, where they and their concerns and ideas and efforts are important. I.e. where they experience a sense of belonging, of worth, of importance; where they feel encouraged to grow, to help, to contribute. The key is to build community centered on the values of sustainable agriculture -- an agriculture that sustains the environment, farm families, and rural communities while delivering affordable and nutritious food and fiber.

Several projects within the IFS initiative have made group-building among people who share a vision of a more-sustainable agriculture their main focus. One example is the Heartland Sustainable Agriculture Network in Kansas and Missouri. This is a network of 13 clusters of farmers scattered from western Kansas wheat country to north-central Missouri’s hilly grasslands. Each cluster includes four to 40 farm families -- a mix of pre-existing relationships and people who really didn’t know each other well before, but who share an interest in learning about and possibly adopting new production or marketing systems. Most clusters also have some involvement by interested non-farmers -- university researchers and Extension educators; food co-ops, processors, input suppliers and other actors in the food economy; or just interested neighbors in rural communities. Ten clusters are focused mainly on production practices such as management-intensive grazing, cover crops, and nutrient management. The other three clusters focus on marketing. Each cluster gets a small amount of funds -- \$3000 to \$30,000 over three years -- from the Heartland Network grant to pay for education and experimentation expenses.

Through these clusters and the two-state network they comprise, farmers curious about alternative practices find kindred spirits, examples to learn from, and an attentive audience eager to hear about their innovations. Community is built within these groups in several ways:

- 1) shared values and visions, articulated through occasional meetings;
- 2) shared work and experiences — cooperative marketing activities in some cases, pasture walks and field trips in others;
- 3) interdependence through active contributions by multiple members of the group to carry out the group’s agreed-upon activities.

This network of clusters is leading to innovation and change in farming practices (as well as to growth in leadership and institutional and policy change). For example, in the Rolling Prairie Alliance, five of eight participating farmers are expanding their land under organic cultivation. In the Four Seasons Graziers cluster, 10 farmers have adopted management intensive grazing. A third cluster, Kansas Organic Producers, has grown from 12 to 33 certified-organic growers in the three years since it joined the Kansas IFS project. Kansas Rural Center has been so impressed with the power of working with groups of farmers, instead of with individual farmers, that they have made this their central strategy in all their work.

2. To find farmers and others who can help establish more-sustainable systems, work through community-based organizations with a mission of promoting sustainability.

Establishing a sustainable agriculture depends on more farmers changing to sustainable practices. But farmers are not a monolithic group, and change is not a uniform process. Some people are set in their ways; others are thinking about making some changes; others are active, ongoing innovators. Change in the sector ripples out from those last two groups. And, as noted in Point 1, the pace of innovation increases when innovators experience a supportive community rather than toiling in isolation (or, worse, community ostracism). People and institutions who wish to aid the change process, then, must connect with people in those two groups -- to help secure and accelerate their success, and to draw on them as key examples, mentors, teachers and spokespersons for sustainable systems.

In the IFS initiative, the Kellogg Foundation has learned that one good way to find this emerging leadership for sustainable agriculture is to partner with community-based organizations with a sustainable agriculture mission. Sustainable agriculture non-governmental organizations (NGOs) already exist, in varying sizes and levels of formality, throughout the regions where these 18 projects are active. Land grant universities and other institutions of conventional agriculture may be unaware of a constituency and leadership core for sustainable agriculture. This is not surprising, since these institutions are associated with chemical-intensive, capital-intensive, specialized, large-scale agriculture, and the farmers and food systems professionals they know best are those that are most comfortable with that approach. Farmers interested in alternative systems -- in integrated, family-scale systems that maximize the utilization of on-farm resources -- often don't look to conventional institutions for help. They have learned not to bother. However, sustainable ag NGOs are actively engaged with

-- often led by -- these sustainable farmers and food system professionals. Indeed, these NGOs have sprung up precisely because conventional institutions were not serving these interests and constituencies well.

Organizations such as Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation, and Community Farm Alliance in Kentucky, and Michigan Agricultural Stewardship Association have extensive networks of farmers and others committed to or curious about sustainable agriculture, who are prime candidates for moving to new levels of farming practice and leadership activism. Each of these organizations has hundreds of dues-paying members, mostly farmers, who are in active communication on issues of sustainable practices and food system change. These organizations have been key actors in the 18 IFS collaboratives; in many cases, they are the official grantee through which Kellogg Foundation support flows to all other collaborating institutions -- because Kellogg staff, and collaborative leaders in the projects, have recognized that these organizations are vital for reaching the community base of sustainable farmers.

3. To build the popular, off-farm base for sustainable agriculture, build ties between farmers and their non-farm neighbors.

Establishing a more-sustainable agriculture depends partly on changing consumer markets and policy systems -- the markets and systems that reward certain kinds of production systems and penalize others. This is a task too big to be accomplished by farmers alone. With only 3% of the population engaged in agriculture, this is patently obvious. Even in agriculture-dependent counties, most people are not directly engaged in farming. Furthermore, Americans are increasingly ignorant of what goes on in agriculture. Two or three generations ago, most Americans knew some farmers through their extended family. But with the continued growth of farm size and concomitant decrease in the number of farmers, and increasing concentration of Americans in urban and suburban areas, fewer people have any personal familiarity with how food is produced.

The current food system in the USA rewards production strategies that externalize as many costs as possible so long as they deliver a lower price to consumers. The ignorance on the part of consumers of the biological and social stewardship issues in food production also leads to simplistic, enforcement-oriented regulatory strategies for environmental protection. There's little appreciation for the role farmers currently play, or could play if market, policy and social reward systems changed. There's also ignorance of what farming

contributes to local community -- and how the structure of agriculture can undermine or bolster community vitality.

The antidote to this is to raise consumers' and neighbors' awareness of food and farming issues, and to build relationships between farmers and non-farmers. The goal must be not just to empower and organize farmers, but to build effective coalitions of farmers and non-farmers: in other words, build community supportive of sustainable agriculture that taps the assets of non-farmers along with farmers. The goal must be to build a broad consumer/political base for an agriculture that conserves the land, maintains water quality, enhances wildlife diversity, protects health, and sustains vigorous agricultural communities.

IFS projects are pursuing this goal through several strategies:

- a. Direct marketing strategies through which consumers get to know the people and farming systems that produce their food. These strategies, such as "community-supported agriculture" (CSAs) and farmers' markets, support local agriculture and offer higher returns per unit of production to farmers. Most of the 18 IFS projects include several direct-marketing ventures.
- b. While direct marketing strategies such as CSAs re-connect farmers and non-farmers through a focus on food production and consumption, several IFS projects have sought to re-connect farmers and others through a focus on environmental stewardship issues. These projects bring together farmers and non-farmers, rural and urban people, around their love of the natural environment and their desire to preserve that environment. These projects recognize that farmers, as people who own much of the land and derive their living from it, are important front-line stewards of soil and water quality.

The most dramatic example of community-building between farmers and environmentalists may be in the Darby Project in central Ohio's Darby Creek watershed. This watershed, on the edge of the expanding Columbus metropolitan area, has been proclaimed by The Nature Conservancy as one of the [10 great wild places] of North America, with remarkable bio-diversity. The Nature Conservancy and other environmentalists have made preservation of Darby's environmental health a priority issue. The Darby watershed has also been primarily a farming region for over 150 years. In other words, that bio-diversity has existed in the midst of -- because of? in spite of? -- commercial farming practices. Yet local farmers, on the one hand, and environmental agencies and organizations, on the other, traditionally have not viewed one another as friends and colleagues. They have been more likely to view the other as a threat to what they hold dear --

as part of the problem, not part of the solution. At the least, while they might not have been active enemies, they certainly have inhabited different worlds.

The Darby IFS Project has focused on bringing farmers and environmentalists to the same table, and building relationships between these two groups. A farmers' organization, named Operation Future Association, was formed to represent farmers in the Darby Partnership, a coalition of over 40 organizations concerned with maintaining environmental quality in the region. The Project has pursued more than just quarterly Partnership meetings to help farmers and others get to know each other. One of the most effective ways has been to organize canoe trips down Darby Creek, putting an environmental professional and a farmer together in a canoe. The environmentalist helps the farmer learn about the surprisingly rich aquatic life and habitat along the Creek, and the farmer helps the environmentalist learn about farmers' soil and water, nutrient and pesticide management practices, as well as about the local farm-based community culture. And of course, the two must cooperate to maneuver the canoe! Such shared experiences have been powerfully useful for humanizing the agricultural/environmental dialogue, and for deepening conversations about how diverse people can collaborate to preserve this precious natural resource and this treasured way of life.

- c. A third way some IFS projects have built the off-farm community base for sustainable agriculture has been through community visioning and action processes that intentionally include farmers and other community residents. These processes typically focus on the questions, "What do we want our community to be like in 10 or 20 years?" and "What can we do to make this vision real?" As farmers and non-farmers explore these questions together, agriculture is considered in its community context, and community in its agricultural context. The issues, and the people, are joined.

One place where this is happening is in western Massachusetts where the Connecticut River Valley Initiative for Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) is active. This IFS project brought together over 80 participants -- consumers, policy makers, farmers, representatives from grassroots organizations and environmental agencies, the Commissioner of Food and Agriculture, and food distributors -- for a Future Search conference. Over three days, the conference reviewed the past and present of agriculture in the valley and identified key components of a sustainable food and farming system for the region. Eight Action Groups, each comprised of diverse community stakeholders, emerged from the conference to pursue specific aspects of this vision: Sustainable Practices and Technology; Financing; Agricultural

Education; Marketing; Farmland Action; Regional Planning; Farm Labor; and Sustainable Living/Sustainable Communities.

4. To develop a shared vision for an agricultural research agenda, collaborate with NGOs that are culturally rooted in the communities affected.

In cases in which the culture of the community is different from the culture of the public institutions that are meant to serve that community, an NGO that is culturally-rooted in the community can serve to build the necessary bridges. Many institutions are staffed by people who are more familiar with norms other than those of the local culture. Even when some staff may have ties to the local culture, there may be disincentives to acknowledge them, particularly when ethnic and political tensions exist. When institutions collaborate with NGOs that are culturally rooted in the communities they serve, community participation is usually greater and the level of support higher. These NGOs are distinguished by the following characteristics:

- a. The NGO's own style of operation, methods, policies and procedures reflect the values of the community and encompass many of its symbols.
- b. People who strongly identify with the culture are found in leadership positions at all levels of the organization.
- c. The NGO creates an environment where community residents, if they choose, can acquire and practice culturally bi-model skills without sacrificing their own cultural identification.
- d. The NGO translates information from the larger world into a context meaningful to the community it serves and makes the community intelligible to the larger world.

Collaboration between an institution and a culturally rooted, community based NGO means redefining the relationship between the two entities, both in terms of what is discussed and how. This process requires each entity to gain an understanding of the real and perceived identity of the other as well as knowledge about each others basic operational procedures. Such information allows members of the collaboration to understand, in structural terms, possibilities as well as limitations.

Two examples of how this is working in IFS projects:

- Southwestern Georgia Alternative Agriculture Projects (southern USA). In this project, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, with staff who

were born and raised in the community, collaborates with the University of Georgia, an institution without history of service to this area and these particular communities. Through effective leadership both at the University and the NGO, University researchers and Extensionists are learning how to help the farmers and community members in this area engage in more sustainable farm practices and develop innovative and more profitable marketing systems.

- Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation was founded in 1980. In this project, the NGO, ALFDC, collaborates with the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff (UAPB). ALFDC regularly uses the expertise of UAPB faculty and Cooperative Extension agents in its work with paraprofessional farmers who mentor other farmers in developing more sustainable farming practices. ALFDC also uses student interns from the university by recruiting promising students for jobs that benefit the community, and is a key advocate for the university in seeking special funds and defining its place in the statewide university system. Contacts and information are frequently shared. ALFDC brings such value to the university that the chancellor now serves on the ALFDC Board which is dominated by representatives from the community.

5. To obtain and sustain community contributions, respectfully recognize and comparably reward indigenous or community-based sources of knowledge, innovation, and invention that contribute to sustainable agriculture.

Indigenous and small, limited resource farmers have been in the forefront of developing sustainable agricultural practices. Only in relatively recent years have agriculture research institutions turned their attention to this important area. While faculty and staff of these institutions are rewarded for their work, the contributions made by farmers and other members of local communities are often taken for granted. This disparity is noticed by community residents, farmers and community-based NGOs and can lead to alienation. To sustain these community contributions, they must be recognized and comparably rewarded.

For example, IFS farmers in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Maryland and California reported that they had more information and experience in sustainable farming practices than did the cooperative extension agents who were available to them. Some of them felt that they were, in effect, training the extension agents who were seeking information from them. These farmers were sensitive to fact that land grant institutions were paying the extension agents for their knowledge, experience, time and energy. However, though benefiting both the agents and the institutions, the farmers' knowledge, experience, time and energy were uncompensated.

Farmers in the IFS initiative have played key roles in every project and have been present at every project-wide networking conference. They have helped to shape the IFS agenda and, in many ways, have educated both the NGOs and the land grant institutions. In some projects they were an important bridge between the two. Farmers have contributed both to the conceptual framework of the initiative, to operational procedures, and to the development of specific farming practices.

Toward the end of the first year of the IFS initiative, farmers became very vocal about the need to include economic sustainability as an important focus. As a result, discussions on developing marketing networks and value-added opportunities were included in IFS project-wide, networking conferences. Both NGOs and land grant institutions became more sensitive to the importance of these issues as a result of the farmers' participation. These discussions are continuing even though Kellogg support for this phase of the IFS initiative is winding down.

Farmers made an additional contribution to the IFS networking process. Project-wide IFS networking conferences were held twice a year over a three-year period. These conferences provided an opportunity for participants in the 18 IFS projects to share ideas and strategies, and to learn from each others experiences. Farmers pointed out that while NGO and institutional staff members were being compensated through their salaries for their participation, farmers were being asked both to donate time and to sacrifice income. Farmers formed a discussion group to bring attention to this concern. As a result, farmers were paid a stipend, in addition to their expenses, to attend the conferences. While this did not completely compensate for loss of income for some farmers, it allowed their participation to continue and improved relationships.

6. To maximize the strengths of communities and institutions, establish mutually beneficial relationships between research institutions and community-based NGOs.

One key to establishing mutually beneficial relationships is to recognize the distinctive strengths of each partner. Understanding the fundamental differences between NGOs and institutions and seeing those differences as assets is a time consuming process as evidenced by IFS projects. NGOs tend to be highly responsive organizations, very aware of trends and conditions as they impact people. In addition to their missions, they are focused upon surviving. Few community-based NGOs have economic security beyond three years. Mistakes or serious glitches in timing can close down their operations. NGOs tend to be a well spring of ideas, and a key link to particular audiences.

Institutions, on the other hand, are structured to take the long view. They are more stable entities. Compared to community-based NGOs, their budgets are enormous. Institutional processes are slow and deliberate. Their strengths lie in documenting trends and conditions, analyzing their long-term significance, and providing information that has been well tested. Even when institutions experience financial pressure, they have many options available to them including public, private, and independent sector support. They have much easier access to many decision makers.

These differences are significant. However, they also contain the means of creating a synergy of vision and purpose by developing niche relationships.

7. To make significant progress in a collaborative mode, recognize the time it takes to build trusting relationships.

Communities know that it takes time to build trusting relationships. You can't get to know a person all at once. And if you don't know them, how can you trust them? Getting to know people happens by: seeing them in action (including going through some action with them), and by learning their story -- their background, their interests and values, their worries and hopes. Trust grows as a person "walks the walk" as well as "talks the talk" -- as they demonstrate the ability to listen, follow through on tasks, keep commitments, share credit, share authority, stick up for themselves and nurture others.

Trust also grows out of understanding someone well. Knowing "where they're coming from" -- discovering not only what their views are but what experiences they've had that have shaped their views -- makes a difference. The history of

relationships matters, too. Many IFS projects started with some well-founded mistrust among partners based on past experience where there were sins of omission or commission — either a failure to listen, understand or help, where there was activity perceived as hostile or pointlessly abrasive.

IFS projects have demonstrated that building effective relationships takes time, and requires disclosure both through task accomplishment and through other kinds of self-revelation and sharing.

For example, building the level of trust necessary to develop a fundable collaborative proposal to the Kellogg Foundation took several years for many projects. This was especially true in places where multiple proposals were initially submitted, and the Foundation told those applicants to find a way to work together as a condition of qualifying for funding. Issues of trust bubbled up again for most projects at various points after they received their grant and tried to move through the project's workplan.

Examples of trust-building steps other than task-performance:

- a. Retreats that included time to get to know one another outside the bounds of the project's specific focus
- b. "Grounding circle" (adapted from Holistic Resource Management methods) at the beginning of project or community meetings -- in which each person in the circle is invited to say how they're feeling as well as what they want out of the meeting.
- c. "Community voices" exercise in which diverse voices within a collaborative have opportunity to speak their mind while other members of the collaborative simply listen and take it in.

Conclusion

By many accounts, the IFS Initiative, though not yet completed, has met with much success both in the realm of changing farm practice and in the realm of building new relationships for future change. We attribute success with this initiative to several factors, including:

1. setting a conceptual foundation that generated a common vision for the future;
2. identifying barriers to achieving that vision;
3. utilizing a collaborative's approach to addressing barriers and goals drawing on the ingredients described in this paper;
4. basing the initiative in the community from the start, so that the assets of farmers, community residents, and community-based organizations could be mobilized;
5. by working simultaneously with communities and institutions, changes are occurring at both the community level and at the level of institutional policy.

The greatest success can perhaps be judged by what we are learning about the essential ingredients of successful community collaboration. It is our hope that by sharing these lessons and the experiences of IFS, we can assist others in their attempts to build a future of agricultural sustainability.

Questions to Consider

1. Is the “IFS Evolution” specific to the USA and the developed countries or can it also be used as a concept for sustainability in other countries and cultures?
2. Is the vision of sustainability developed for IFS an appropriate vision for other countries and cultures?
3. Are the barriers that were identified for IFS similar for other countries and cultures?
4. How important is community collaboration for sustainable agriculture change efforts world-wide?
5. Are the lessons learned about community collaboration with IFS more broadly applicable to other countries and cultures? If not, what are some important lessons about community collaboration in other parts of the world?

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Our mission is to help increase the effectiveness and impact of socially concerned organizations in responding to social problems. We work in support of organizations and communities to help them achieve their goals.

Your organization and community can experience these results from participation in Rainbow Research activities – tailored studies, workshops, and partnerships – and use of our tools and publications.

We can help you to:

Improve your understanding of key program elements that contribute to program effectiveness.

Improve program impact through integrating principles of program effectiveness into day-to-day operations.

Improve management of resources to achieve program purposes.

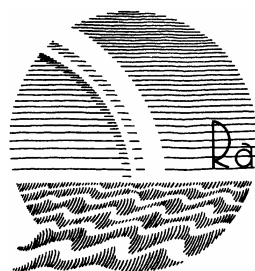
Improve the fit between your organization's activities and your community's needs and opportunities.

Improve commitment of staff and Board to your organization's mission.

Improve communication between your organization and its various stakeholders and publics.

Improve linkages between your organization and other like-minded organizations.

Improve access to tools and support services that strengthen program performance.



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