

Definition of a Sustainable Food System

Calgary's definition

A sustainable food system is a collaborative network that integrates several components in order to enhance a community's environmental, economic and social well-being. It is built on principles that further the ecological, social and economic values of a community and region. Characteristics of a sustainable food system are outline below (based on Pothukuchi and Jufman, 1999):

- is secure, and therefore reliable and resilient to change (including climate change, rising energy prices, etc) and accessible and affordable to all members of society;
- is energy efficient'
- is an economic generator for farmers, whole communities and regions'
- is healthy and safe;
- is environmentally beneficial or benign'
- uses creative water reclamation and conservation strategies for agricultural irrigation;
- balances food imports with local capacity'
- adopts regionally-appropriate agricultural practices and crop choices'
- works towards organic farming;
- contributes to both community and ecological health;
- builds soil quality and farmland through the recycling of organic waste;
- supports multiple forms of urban as well as rural food production'
- ensures that food processing facilities are available to farmers and processors;
- is celebrated through community events, markets, restaurants, etc;
- preserves biodiversity in agro-ecosystems as well as in the crop selection;
- has a strong educational focus to create awareness of food and agricultural issues, and
- is fairly traded by providing a fair wage to producers and processors locally and abroad.

The Kindling Trust (United Kingdom)

Sustainable food takes into account environmental, health, social and economic concerns and consists of eight inter-related principles. Although few progressive food ventures meet all of the principles below, this definition is an underlying aspiration to drive awareness-raising and change within our organizations and the wider food system.

1. Local & seasonal
2. Organic & sustainable farming

3. Reduce foods of animal origin & maximise welfare standards
4. Excludes fish species identified at risk
5. Fair-trade-certified products
6. Promote health and well being
7. Food democracy
8. Reduction of waste and packaging

Sustainable Food Lab

We define a sustainable food and agriculture system as one in which the fertility of our soil is maintained and improved; the availability and quality of water are protected and enhanced; our biodiversity is protected; farmers, farm workers, and all other actors in value chains have livable incomes; the food we eat is affordable and promotes our health; sustainable businesses can thrive; and the flow of energy and the discharge of waste, including greenhouse gas emissions, are within the capacity of the earth to absorb forever.

USDA Definition

Congress arrived at a definition of sustainable agriculture when it passed the "Farm Bill" (Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990). It characterized sustainable agriculture as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices that meet America's need for food and fiber and enhance the natural resources that food growing depends upon. These practices also include efficient use of nonrenewables, keeping production economically viable and enhancing both the farmer's and society's quality of life.

A sustainable food system, reconciles ecological, social and economic imperatives, and is based on a hierarchy of nested objectives.

- equitable access to local and seasonable produce
- access to local, organic produce both in local markets and local supermarkets
- access to diverse year-round local farmers' markets
- access to local and seasonable, and organic produce sold in local supermarkets
- enriches biodiversity at all levels, micro-organisms to soil to animals
- minimizes animal suffering through local access to processing, thus also mitigating GHG emissions
- committed to humane treatment of all animals
- integrated into local restaurants, hospitals, schools and public institutions