

University of Oxford, MAY 02, 2015

There is increasing recognition across multiple disciplines that culture and society shapes food systems on multiple levels—from selection of foods and genetics of crops to diverse systems of production, distribution, and consumption. These systems are often conceived of as ‘biocultural’ systems, whereby human and nature are inextricably linked. In understanding and addressing the challenges these systems face, it is apparent that one cannot separate the “bio” from the “cultural”. The systems are often adapted to local environmental conditions (e.g. climate, geography, soil) and consist of a robust body of local knowledge about the landscape, local/traditional varieties, and natural resources management, which holds promises for a more sustainable future and yet doesn’t often fit into our typical view of food systems. As such, many of these biocultural systems are being lost at accelerating rates due to pressures from globalization and environmental change.

Bringing together researchers from the social and natural sciences as well as practitioners, this interdisciplinary conference will look at the interplay between culture, food, and the environment. Such framing necessarily shifts the discussion from global food systems to local food systems, although the effects of and implications for large scale food production are important and should also be considered. The conference will examine the role of policy in helping or hindering these systems, as well as the ethics around upscaling or sourcing the plants, animals, and insects that comprise them. Finally, conference discussions will explore what new ‘futures of food’ are arising (or might arise), given recent shifts in how we conceptualize food sovereignty and security.

Researchers across the social and biological sciences, NGOs, farmers, and businesses are invited to submit a **300 word abstract** for a **15 minute oral paper/presentation**. We also invite **proposals for visual depictions or ‘mind maps’** of key issues in food security and sovereignty.\* All abstracts should additionally include an **author ‘biography’** of no more than 100 words (i.e. author’s education and experience). The deadline for abstracts and visuals proposals will be **December 31, 2014**, and decisions on abstracts will be sent out in the early part of 2015. For submissions and any questions, please contact [oxford.food.forum.2015@gmail.com](mailto:oxford.food.forum.2015@gmail.com).

The conference will be divided into the following three major themes:

**Biocultural Diversity & the Environment:** Recent research from plant sciences, ethnobiology, and geography indicate that culture plays a key role (historically and in the present) in contributing to the biological and genetic diversity of plant, animal, and insect food sources (e.g. landraces, heritage varieties). At the same time, anthropological research has highlighted the role of social practices (e.g. trait selection, geographic movement, social exchange of resources) in the sustainable use of these natural resources and the resilience of

local communities to environmental change. Papers using case studies/field research are invited to explore this link between society and resource exploitation, and the effect of environmental and social change on biocultural resources and the food systems around them.

**Policy, Ethics, & Resilience:** Increasingly, international, national, and local policies have focused on generating new guidelines on land use, access to natural resources, and movement across landscapes in order to promote biodiversity, sustainable land use, and social resilience. Although beneficial at times, these policies can inadvertently threaten social systems of food production by promoting a particular dominant or *Western* ideal. Papers are invited that examine the ethical implications around access to land, upscaling/sourcing marginal foods, and how to generate dialogue between stakeholders.

**New Perspectives & Applied Research:** How can new ways of conceiving food security and food sovereignty contribute to applied projects focusing on food systems? These might include: analysis of the discourse around food security, models for ethical food production/sourcing/consumption, and insights from other cultures about what it means to be 'food secure.' Papers focusing on the challenges in moving from academic to applied research, or implementing academic-generated policies/models, are also encouraged.

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**\* Visual Representations and 'Mind Maps'**

Researchers and practitioners are also invited to present visual 'mind maps' of how they conceive the issues of food security, food sovereignty, and food production. Relevant questions to address include: what are the most pertinent areas for research? What are the key impediments to sustainable food systems? Where are the conflicts, and where are the synergies? When discussing food issues, individuals from different disciplines and backgrounds often have divergent conceptions of the problems, which can lead to polarised debates in which participants speak past each other. Visualizations can provide a simple route into understanding how individuals' worldviews differ, opening up a platform to discuss potential conflicts or alignments and how to work through them.