

**Connecticut Council for Philanthropy
Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems
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Statement by Bill Duesing, executive director of CT NOFA, Bill@ctnofa.org

Thank you for inviting me. It is a pleasure to be here with so many colleagues in the important and exciting, agriculture and food systems work here in Connecticut.

Special thanks for your interest in this critical topic. I believe that feeding ourselves in a way that improves our health and the health of the earth is the biggest challenge we face. We need to understand that the current industrial food system is destroying human and environmental health in the search for cheap food that turns out to be really expensive when the human, community and environmental health costs are counted.

We should put the food system at the center of our planning for the future at all levels. For example we need very different infrastructure if we are eating processed and packaged food that is produced all over the planet, then we do if we are eating largely from our communities.

Food is our most important connection to the earth, after air and water. In the industrial food system, that connection is largely far away, damaging to the earth, dependent on cheap energy, a stable climate and tax subsidies. All those are in doubt (except the tax subsidies for growing corn and other commodities).

Food is our most important energy source. It is the way we take solar energy into our bodies to power them. (Currently we use at least 10 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of food energy.)

Food is critical to our health. Many of the most serious and expensive, chronic diseases are related to the food we eat.

CT NOFA is a non-profit organization of about 800 farmers, gardeners, land care professionals, businesses and others who are Cultivating an Organic Connecticut. We've been educating and advocating for a local and organic food system here since 1982.

We do this through conferences, workshops, farm tours and collaborations with agricultural, environmental justice, educational, land conservation, community gardening and farming organizations and state agencies.

What is organic agriculture?

The USDA says "Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore,

maintain and enhance ecological harmony.

The primary goal of organic agriculture is to optimize the health and productivity of interdependent communities of soil life, plants, animals and people."

National Organic Standards Board, 1997

In this venue, I'd like to mention that the NOFA regional organization is one of four founders of the Agricultural Justice Project, designed to bring fairness to workers in all parts of the food system.

Farmland protection has been a part of NOFA's mission since 1982, but we couldn't do much beyond education, advocacy and a conference until we received our 501c3 status and employed the first staff in 2000. Through the opportunity to join the board of Connecticut Farmland Trust, I was able to participate in the real work of protecting farmland. (Bringing Henry Talmage to CT was a proud accomplishment of my term as president there.)

I'd like to give a shout out to Working Lands Alliance, and Jiff Maritn's leadership there. The Alliance has played an important role in creating what our chairman calls "a fierce collaboration" among many players in Connecticut's agriculture to protect farmland.

There's been an incredible growth in agricultural projects here in the past decade! Here I'm going to broaden the definition of agriculture. From the Farmers Cow, new farmers, farmers markets and small farms to community farms and gardens, backyard chickens, the interest and activity has exploded.

This is part of the trend everywhere!

There is a newish term you should know-agroecology. It encompasses a wide variety of ways to feed ourselves.

According to agroecology.org, agroecology is based on these principles:

- Using renewable resources
- Minimizing toxics
- Conserving resources, including soil, water, energy, genetic resources and capital
- Managing ecological relationships
- Adjusting to local environments
- Diversifying landscapes, biota and economics
- Empowering people
- Managing whole systems
- Maximizing long term benefits and
- Valuing the health of people, cultures, the environment, animals and plants

Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food said in December 2010, "To feed 9 billion people in 2050, we urgently need to adopt the most efficient farming techniques available. And today's scientific evidence demonstrates that

agroecological methods outperform the use of chemical fertilizers in boosting food production in regions where the hungry live.

As an example of the differences between industrial agriculture and agroecology, we can compare the production of an acre of corn grown in Iowa with the fruits and vegetables grown on 1.7 (less than 2) acres of community gardens in New York City.

According to the Iowa State University, an acre of corn in Iowa produces about \$900 worth of corn (roughly 10,000 pounds of shelled corn) and it costs the farmer over \$800 to produce that corn. That cost doesn't include the costly effects of that corn production on soil health, on the climate (from the release of nitrous oxides and carbon dioxide when the high nitrogen fertilizer is applied) and on the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

In NYC, the group Farming Concrete surveyed the production of those 1.7 acres of community gardens. They found that the gardeners there produced over 87,000 pounds of vegetables and fruits worth over \$200,000. They did that largely with human labor, recycled materials and mostly organic methods.

If you are going to support agriculture for the future, which would be the most effective agriculture to support? For our future food security, permanently protecting the smaller production areas in cities may be as important as protecting prime farmland.

I'd like to call your attention to a study of the earth's vital life support systems that was carried out in 2009 by several dozen leading earth scientists. They found that three important life support systems are way outside the safe zone. They are: climate change, nitrogen use and biodiversity loss. All of those are closely connected with the way we feed ourselves and are brought more into the safe zone by a more local and organic food system and agriculture.

There are four important characteristics of a food system that I'd like to mention. I'd like to see a food system that provides knowledge, is democratically controlled, is largely run on solar energy and which builds community.

This is all a big challenge, but the evidence points to the value of a more local and organic food system. It is a good thing that there is currently so much enthusiasm among the public and especially young people for good food, locally and largely organically grown.

Thank you.

RESOURCES

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) defines organic agriculture as: "a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local

conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment."

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