

Food Policy Councils in California

Bridging research and policy: An Assessment of strategic relationships between UC Cooperative Extension, food policy councils, and research institutions in California

Strategic Initiatives: Healthy Families & Communities, Sustainable Food Systems

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Introduction

Food policy councils (FPCs) consist of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system who advise and work with city, county, and state governments to promote the social, economic, and environmental health of local and regional food systems. They work on a variety of issues that overlap with UC ANR, including access to healthy food and food production on farms, ranches and in urban areas.

Some local food policy councils develop close partnerships with county-based Cooperative Extension (CE); however, it remains unclear how FPCs engage with UCCE and leverage existing research institutions and their resources to inform their work.

Methods

Our interdisciplinary team of UCCE researchers conducted over 60 semi-structured interviews with 10 California FPCs and facilitated focus groups and participant observation to understand how FPCs interact with UC ANR and use research-based information as well as other sources of knowledge to inform their policy work and related activities.

Goals

- What links to UC (or other) research institutions do FPCs currently have?
- How were these links established and how are they maintained?
- How and to what extent do FPCs currently leverage research (especially that of UC ANR) for their policy work and with what effects/impact?
- How do researcher-FPC relationships influence FPCs' impacts on policy-making?
- What are the best practices and lessons learned for FPCs, for research institutions, and specifically for UC ANR?

Findings

Rather than a narrow focus on policy work, a key FPC function is information sharing to build trust, local coordination and collaboration, and promote systems thinking.

FPCs obtain outside information and research from members who are 'knowledge brokers,' individuals who are connected to many different knowledge sources and are able to draw on these myriad sources to serve their council's data and information needs.

Many FPCs use both quantitative data and qualitative data in the form of experiential stories to advocate for or against policies.

Many FPCs use issue-based working groups or other short-term alliances to promote policy change.

Each FPC is shaped by their context, and require local, community based information to inform their operations and priorities.

How UCCE can Engage

FPCs provide a **venue** for UCCE to share research results with diverse stakeholders that may inform policy and program priorities

FPCs act as hubs for making **community connections** and **building relationships** with key leaders

UCCE nutrition & farm advisors can engage these groups to **influence local policy** and/or extend reach of their programming

By providing relatively small levels of support such as meeting space, facilitation, etc., UCCE advisors can help **build community good will** toward extension

UCCE advisors provide **content area expertise and local knowledge** that can assist FPCs in developing policies, as in the case of a local UCCE advisor providing science-based information during urban agriculture working group meetings for a beekeeping ordinance



UCCE Marin's Julia Van Soelen Kim and David Lewis (left) join the Marin Food Policy Council for a Board of Supervisors' Resolution of Food Day, October 2015

Food Policy Councils say...

"Having that UC Extension person, and that connection is great, because they have their fingers in so many parts of the community, and it can help keep those relationships in ag going. There's so many components to agriculture...and the **UC Extension agent can help connect that.**"