

Urban University Food Systems Roles and Reflections

Julie M. Fox, PhD, Ohio State University Extension, fox.264@osu.edu / Urban Food Systems Symposium, June 11-13, 2024, Columbus, OH

Introduction

Food systems have a great bearing on the quality of urban life (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Urban university influence on food systems begins at the highest levels and is strengthened by the collaborative commitment of diverse stakeholders (Fox, 2017). To better understand the various dimensions related to the university's roles in urban food systems, this poster explores intentional linkages, significant developments, natural tensions, and emerging impacts since the 2017 Metropolitan Universities Journal article, *Collective Approach to Complex Food System Issues, the Case of The Ohio State University*. Since 2017, some things have changed, such as the hiring of the new urban food system faculty, development of new facilities, and the appointment of a new university president. And some things remain similar, such as community-engaged scholarship and student engagement through food system student organizations, academic groups, and the Buckeye Food Alliance. During the university's sesquicentennial in 2020, a summit focused on urban universities and thriving communities.

Roles

As a model 21st century public, land grant, research, urban, community-engaged institution, Ohio State is uniquely positioned to make powerful and lasting contributions with urban food systems through an integrated framework.

Outreach & Engagement

2017: Ohio State respectfully engages with diverse stakeholders through food system projects that are aligned with community priorities and that recognize geographic, cultural, and other multi-stakeholder influences.

2024: The scale, diversity, and complexity of urban communities presents opportunities and challenges with urban universities navigating extensive networks of interrelated food system stakeholder relationships. An ever-emerging network of diverse partners includes neighborhood groups; schools and libraries; public officials and agencies; private business and industry; non-profit organizations and philanthropists. In addition to the well-established Extension network across the state, Ohio State added a vice provost for urban research and community engagement.

Teaching & Learning

2017: Urban food system interests are addressed across interdisciplinary degree programs; studio assignments, capstone projects and internships; service learning and education abroad experiences; special events, and other learning options.

2024: Increased efforts toward interdisciplinary education and workforce development initiatives are reflected in collaborative courses and degree programs offered through the College of Public Health, College of Medicine, John Glenn College of Public Affairs, CFAES, and the Knowlton School's City and Regional Planning section. Examples of new faculty include an urban food systems horticulturalist, an urban agriculture specialist, an urban entomologist, and an economist focused on food accessibility, food security, behavioral economics, and economics of trust.

Research & Innovation

2017: The university invests in innovation through transdisciplinary discovery themes; food and agricultural research centers; and other economic, environmental, and social food system developments.

2024: Evidence of urban food system research and innovation continues through Ohio State's developments, such as the Waterman 261-acre university facility with a Controlled Environment Agriculture Research Complex, a student farm, and much more. The emerging 350-acre Carmentown district builds connections and community through public and private investment. Discovery and scholarship extends through all six Ohio State campuses; diverse labs and research stations; and space research.

Resource Stewardship

2017: Similar to other urban universities, Ohio State creates a campus culture that embraces sustainability, communicates its benefits, and rewards innovation. Priorities include addressing local food sourcing, food waste, and more.

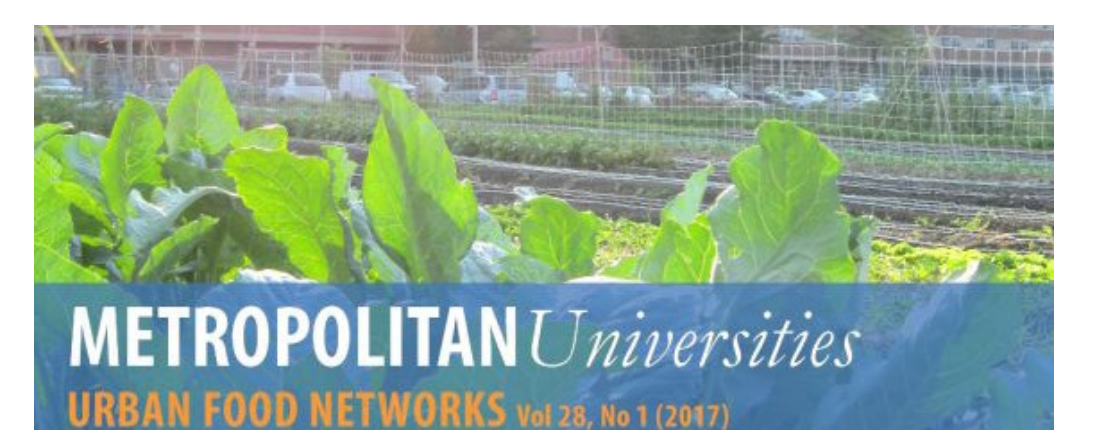
2024: The university's portfolio includes fiscal, environmental, human, and other resources. Investments, such as the Sustainability Institute, launched in 2019, advance sustainability and resilience through shared commitments and collaboration with academic and operational units across the university. Sustainability innovation can be seen across the university, including in Dining Services, an \$80 million unit serving 40,000 meals a day through 35 outlets. Ohio State retains the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education STARS Gold rating.



Reflections

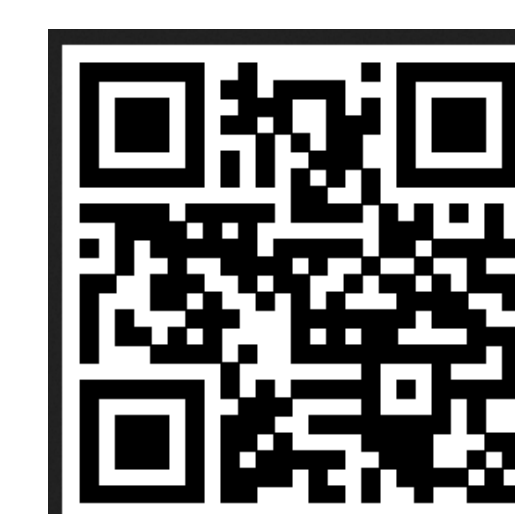
These common themes identified in the 2017 Metropolitan Universities Journal issue on Urban Food Networks remain relevant today:

- essential approach of collaboration;
- value of diverse voices and perspectives;
- influence of distinct urban contexts; and
- complexity of food system issues.



At Ohio State, intentional campus and community linkages foster innovation in urban food system engagement, teaching, research, and resource stewardship. Significant developments appear through new investments in people, facilities, and projects. At times, natural tensions emerge due to diverse multistakeholder interests. Impacts of collaboration improve the university, as well as local and global communities the university serves. The framework for urban food systems reflects Ohio State's framework that looks through the lens of sustainability and wellness in planning for stewardship, connectivity, experience, and community.

As the world continues to urbanize, Ohio State and other urban universities can leverage their unique resources to address important issues, such as those related to urban food systems.



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References

[2024 Urban Food Systems Symposium](#)

[Metropolitan Universities Journal Urban Food Networks Issue](#)

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[Defining the New Urban Land-Grant University: A Theory of Leadership, Action and Impact, Provost's Discovery Themes Lecturer Program, OSU Sesquicentennial](#)

[The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System for higher education, The Ohio State University](#)

[The Ohio State University's Framework Plan](#)

