

Towards Resilience: The Value of Brokerage and Coordination in Local and Regional Food Value Chain Networks

Sarah Rucker, PhD Candidate, Rural Sociology
Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education

Abstract

Recent efforts to foster local and regional food systems have focused on (re)building physical infrastructure such as packing houses, distribution centers, processing and co-marketing facilities. However, the success of these regional food chains is dependent on more than physical infrastructure alone. Value chain coordinators are actors who are actively engaged in stitching together other diverse actors in the food system, in order to create more connected, efficient and ultimately sustainable value chain networks. This project will conduct two comparative case studies of regionally based value chains, with the aim of mapping and analyzing their social networks to better understand the function, benefits, and challenges of value chain coordinators within regional food value chains. This study proposes a social network study of value chain coordinators with the goals of a) better understanding the scope of their work and function in facilitating value chain connections b) creating a set of metrics beyond solely economic measures which articulate the extent of their impact to both individuals in the value chain and the network as a whole. This is a significant time to be studying the effects of social coordination in regional food networks, as the fostering of partnerships and relations between sustainably-oriented producers, processors and buyers, may be viewed as a critical social foundation towards building more vibrant and economically thriving communities, while mitigating threats to overall food insecurity.