

Setting the Table for Food Security in Ohio and Beyond



InFACT was launched over five years ago and soon began strategic planning for how our Discovery Themes initiative would achieve the aspirations stated in the founding proposal. A faculty hiring plan came first, in January 2015, and the outline of the strategic plan was ready by February, 2017, after Executive Director Brian Snyder joined InFACT. Since then the plan has continued to evolve and focus our work, especially since we were all faced with a national health emergency that makes clear how essential the work of InFACT is for Ohio and elsewhere. It seems fitting, then, to pause for a review of the essential elements of our strategic plan.

Following are major pieces of our plan as they have developed over the years, concluding with our biggest goal in terms of building an enduring structural component of the university and the community it serves.

Definition

The Initiative for Food and AgriCultural Transformation (InFACT) is a transdisciplinary program at The Ohio State University aimed at designing and implementing food systems that are sustainable, defined as achieving a balance of ecology, economy, technology and culture to promote the overall well-being of people, animals and the natural environment.

Mission

InFACT will transform the way we grow, process and distribute our food, leading to vibrant, sustainable and resilient agriculture that places nourishing food at the center of just and vital communities in Ohio and beyond.

Core Values

Note: we began the whole process of strategic planning by determining our core values, and arrived at a strong consensus on the following four statements, which have remained intact throughout the entire process:

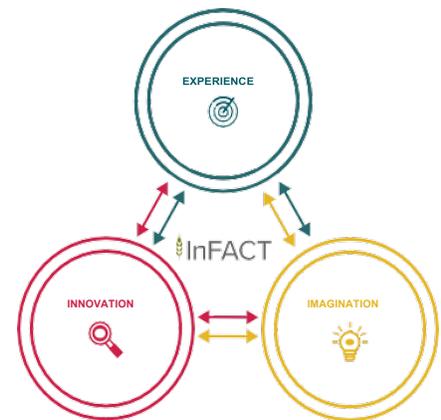
-  **Innovation, leadership and ecological awareness** in our academic endeavors and engagement with communities.
-  **Equity and social justice** for all.
-  **Diversity, transparency and continuous improvement** in farming and food systems.
-  **Scientific discovery** balanced with **Indigenous knowledge** to honor diverse sources of knowing as well as generations of students, teachers, communities, families and farmers working together.

Strategic Goals

1. **Research Agenda and Progress Tracking** – Continuously build research capacity and new models of transformational agriculture and food systems while measuring progress on our vision.
2. **Network Convening and Goal Setting** – Build a broad-based, interactive network of stakeholders convened at least once every year, to coordinate work on a set of common goals.
3. **Local and Sustainable Food Availability** – Facilitate a comprehensive system, involving production and purchasing, to make fresh food, produced as locally and sustainably as possible, available to all students, faculty and staff.
4. **Transdisciplinary Food Systems Clinic** – Establish a transdisciplinary food systems clinic, known nationally for its expertise in, and support for, the development of resilient, just and equitable food systems for all.
5. **Six-Campus Collaborative Presence** – Establish an InFACT presence on each of six Ohio State campuses with at least one part-time staff position that would work collaboratively to positively impact each campus community.

Research Agenda

InFACT is coordinating and supporting the work of faculty from 10 colleges to provide research-based transition pathways to new diversified agricultural landscapes that improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of both people and the land. InFACT faculty affiliates and our many partners work together using a transdisciplinary approach to discover how to transform agricultural and food landscapes, with new models that offer measurable improvements in food and nutritional security. Following is our current InFACT blueprint for transformational research to improve food security:



Transdisciplinary Approach

Availability

- Discover diversified farming systems with economic, social and environmental benefits.
- Discover economies of scope that support diversification of agricultural landscapes.
- Discover landscape designs and policies that support diversified agricultural systems.

Access

- Explore balanced and integrated supply chains from local to global scales for access, safety, and transparency.
- Discover means of reducing food waste across the supply chain and turn remaining waste into raw materials for value-added processing.
- Measure, expose and explore how to reduce inequities in food access among populations.

Utilization

- Explore how food landscapes impact geographic patterns of food consumption.
- Discover the multiple values that influence transitions in food culture and use.
- Discover creative new dietary patterns that improve health and well-being in communities.

Theory of Change

The following graphical depiction shows InFACT's assumption that, not only the problems we wish to address, but also the key elements of solutions, are inherent in the communities we serve, and that's where we should start in defining our work. Ultimately, it is in the relationship between communities and the university, acknowledging and utilizing the resources each has to offer, where necessary culture change can occur, leading to a more regenerative food system.



The Outcome – A Threefold Hybrid Organization

Key to the overall plan is a strategy that combines **transdisciplinary research** and **technical assistance**, both as described above, to support the knowledge discovery, culture change and new food systems we wish to see. But to really drive this agenda forward there is one additional element that is needed, which is **innovative financing** to assure the new food system infrastructure needed for transformational change can be built. To that end, InFACT intends to pursue a development finance approach with the dual intent of funding both the necessary infrastructure, working with community-based partners and entrepreneurs, and the research underpinning to improve chances of success and help us learn from mistakes made along the way.

Each of the three main aspects of the plan (research, technical assistance, financing) will support the other two in a synergistic manner, and collectively they will provide opportunities for both faculty and students to participate in a dynamic learning process. The endpoint of the strategic plan is then to create a hybrid organization that operates as a **research institute** and **food systems clinic** within Ohio State, and an InFACT-led **development finance agency** outside the university as a catalyst for critical food system infrastructure in the community.