

Theme Overview: Transformations in the Food System, Nutritional and Economic Impacts

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JEL Classifications: D10, I15, Q13, R20 M310, Q130

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This theme highlights opportunities and challenges of contemporary food systems in general, with a particular focus on aspects that are more common in urban systems. Urban agriculture issues are especially relevant given that over 50% of the world's population resides in urban areas. In the United States, the share of the population in urban areas is even higher, at 80% (World Bank, 2016).

Two of the articles focus on consumer preferences for and acceptance of relatively novel food production methods and urban geographies, with an emphasis on how fully those characteristics are perceived as "natural." Coyle and Ellison studied consumer perceptions of vertical farming techniques for growing fresh produce and conclude that this production method, while generally acceptable in terms of safety and quality, is viewed as less natural and overall less acceptable by some; subsequently, consumers were less likely to purchase vertically grown produce. Printezis and colleagues report on urban farming as it relates to consumers' preferences for natural production types. Their findings indicate that produce labeled as locally grown is preferred when shoppers perceive urban farming and organic production to be natural.

Three of the articles in this theme focus on dietary changes among children. Roche and colleagues report on a school garden approach to nudging children toward healthier choices, with a long-term goal of decreasing obesity. Two important findings are that children in this national study had increased self-efficacy and reported planning to eat vegetables after participating in a school garden program. Kolodinsky and colleagues report on an on-going transdisciplinary cost-offset community supported agriculture project with a similar goal of decreasing childhood obesity. This article discusses how a formative evaluation with input from CSA members, farmers, and extension professionals informed an intervention currently in the field. Becot and colleagues report on potential economic impacts of farm-to-school programs and needed improvements to data collection and modeling.

Ultimately, the American food system includes large and small producers and a consuming public with a large variety of preferences and price points. This collection of articles addresses the expanding choices Americans have in the food system and provides insight to stakeholders about the variety of approaches that are available to meet their needs, including the increasing prevalence of food system activities emerging in urban areas of the United States.

For More Information

World Bank. 2016. "Urban Population (% of Total)." Available

online: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?end=2015&start=2015&view=bar>

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