

Development of local food systems help bridge gap among people with different views

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One of the major barriers that environmentalists face in trying to implement sustainable practices is getting disparate groups to agree on what needs protecting and which way is the best course of action.

Work by a University of Kansas researcher shows that the development of local food systems in Kansas and Missouri could help bridge some of those gaps, especially as the process of sharing sustainable farming knowledge and educating local consumers provides an avenue for finding common ground across differing moral orders and environmental ideologies.

"Many of the farmers I talked to expressed being surprised at the relationships they built with people who were so different than them," said Ruth Stamper, a KU doctoral candidate in Sociology.

Stamper will present her findings on Tuesday, Aug. 15, at the American Sociological Association's 2017 annual meeting in Montreal.

In her interviews with Kansas and Missouri farmers seeking to develop sustainable agricultural practices as part of local food systems, she found a mix of first-time farmers usually entering the arena for environmental reasons and multi-generation farmers who were looking to change their approach, or at least differ from corporate farming operations.

Local farmers tend to raise crops and livestock to produce food that can be consumed locally, often sold through [farmers markets](#) or at home.

Corporate farming operations often raises crops solely for livestock consumption, rather than as food meant to make it directly to someone's dinner table.

Religious beliefs among the [local farmers](#) she interviewed often emerged as the most obvious difference that participation in local food systems tended to bridge, she said. Much of the traditional family farmers were devout Christians who would often initially voice skepticism about first-generation farmers, likely having reticence about environmentalism and worshipping of nature or farmers who were members of the LGBTQ community.

Instead, as they began to interact more with each other within the local food system and farming efforts, they became more accepting of those not like them.

"The local farmers all have the same kind of end goal in mind, even though they were coming from two different ideologies," said Stamper, who farms near Joplin, Missouri. "They were coming together to build these local food networks, to educate and produce consumers for their products. They shared practices and how they were educating themselves, creating this space where they are building they relationships that haven't necessarily developed before."

This type of research could be key in helping develop local food systems and movements, Stamper said.

"It's crucial to be studying local food networks and [sustainable agriculture](#) because it's a very important way that we can be addressing climate change," she said. "We need to be focusing on local solutions. Supporting sustainable agriculture is really vital for healthy, [food](#)-secure communities, for our relationship to the environment, and especially for finding ways to come together across these ideological divides to address

serious environmental concerns."

Provided by University of Kansas

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