

Module 1



**FRAMING YOUR COMMUNITY
ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT
PROCESS:
DEFINING THE PARAMETERS OF
YOUR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM**

Key Topics Covered



- Articulate the potential planning decisions or investments the assessment will inform
- Identify more specific goals or objectives
- Identify the scope and potential outcomes
- Organize an effective and inclusive team
- Determine an appropriate timeframe
- Examine available resources--are adequate to meet your goals?
- Utilize visual schematics to engage community members.

Potential Outcomes if Well Designed

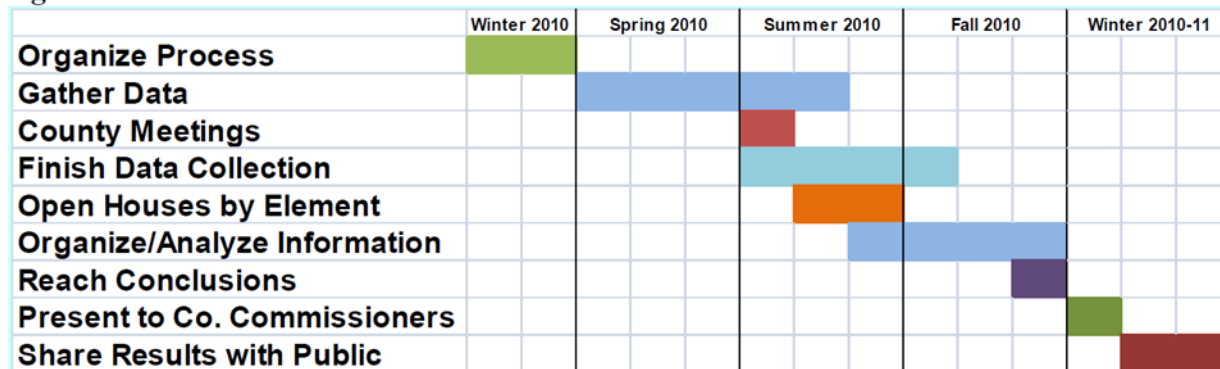


- New investments in food system projects such as a community garden, commercial kitchen, or public lands repurposed to food production;
- Updated policies to address barriers to food system
 - Enterprise zones
 - Redefined zones for farm-based food marketing
 - Scale-appropriate food safety guidelines;
- Coordinated planning for food initiatives
 - Food recovery from farms and markets
 - A virtual food hub
 - A community branding campaign.

Structuring the Assessment Process to Enhance Success

- Assembling Project Team Members
- Establishing a Timeline and set of Roles
- Scoping the Study appropriately
 - Study Parameters
 - Priority Issues

Figure 2: Timeline for Northern Colorado Food Assessment







Assembling Project Team Members



- What are the specific skills and experiences of each prospective team member?
 - Technical assistance partners may also be key players
- Does your project team include team members with expertise in examining local food system issues from a variety of perspectives?
 - Geography (rural vs. urban food issues), scale (small vs. large enterprises), market orientation (different segments of the supply chain)?
- Is there one person who can be assigned the task of serving as the overall project coordinator?

Case Study: Northern CO Food Assessment

Project Advisory Team Meeting Schedule

Participant	March	April	June	August	Sept	Nov	Dec
Boulder County PAT 	4	22	24	12	14	11	6
Larimer County PAT 	4	1	15	5	2	4	6
Weld County PAT 	11	29	24	19	9	17	6
Steering Committee 	26	30	30	26	29		6

- Leadership team drew upon the expertise of both individual, county-based advisory groups, and an overarching steering committee
 - Each county group met monthly to compile feedback
 - Leadership team decided on refinements or next steps
- This governing structure allowed for better coordination across the regional effort, and enabled the leadership to get more focused feedback and integration of what each county was discussing.

Constructing a Leadership Team and Recruiting Partners



- Do the collective abilities of the project leadership allow you to effectively frame, inform, and interpret a food system assessment?
- Does the leadership team incorporate a diversity of opinions and experiences to guide the planning, data collection, and analysis process?
- Are the members of the leadership team/advisory panel flexible enough?
- Is the planning/implementation process iterative enough to allow for interactive learning and refocusing as findings are uncovered and shared?

Identifying the Study Parameters and Priority Issues



Setting the Stage

- What is the goal of the study?
 - Is it being conducted to generate interest in investment in local foods? Target an education, research or outreach program?
 - Change or revisit a key policy?
 - Are you conducting an integrated evaluation of distinct (or overlapping) activities or are you focused on a single activity?
- Who is the primary audience?

Who is at the Table?



- Which stakeholders are currently involved?
 - What food system sectors do they represent?
- What business models are represented?
 - What networks of relationships are represented?
- Who else should be at the table?
 - What sectors are not represented? If they are not responsive to requests/recruiting, how can their perspective be considered?
- Do you have the requisite expertise in your team or do you need to hire a facilitator and/or analyst?
- Do you have racial and cultural diversity to reflect your community?

Expected Outcomes



- How will you measure success?
 - The key to creating good measurements is a clear purpose and a clear set of goals
- Who cares about your results?
- One of the simplest ways to assess the degree of progress is to identify, define the parameters of, and measure movement in key system “levers”
 - Jobs, market channels available, business linkages

Study Scope



- What are the geographic boundaries for the study?
 - Political boundaries such as states and counties may make it easier to collect data
 - But they do not necessarily reflect commerce/commuting patterns in local and regional markets.
- Are there other agencies or organizations working on similar initiatives?
 - Will that influence your project's scope of work? Are there opportunities to combine efforts?

Timeframe



- What is your time frame for this study?
 - The timeframe is very important as it has the potential to limit the scope of your assessment significantly.
- Relevant questions that should be incorporated into your planning and scheduling process to reflect decisions on your timeframe include:
 - ✦ Do you need to talk to farmers? When would they likely have free time?
 - ✦ Do you seek a snapshot of current conditions, or are you trying to identify long-term trends?
 - ✦ Are you trying to meet a political deadline, or a funder's mission, funding priorities, or timeline?

Resources



- Does the scope of your study align with the resources available?
 - Your team may need to reduce the project's scope if available resources are scarce.
 - Narrowing the scope of the project to ensure that what you do is done well is better than sacrificing quality.
- A preliminary assessment that does a good job on a smaller scale may yield the additional resources to complete a larger scope of work
 - Do you know what comparable costs are for studies of similar scope and geographic scale?

Goals of Your Community Food Systems Assessment



- **Geographic Scope:**
 - May be dictated by jurisdiction, organization, interest in participation, data availability, resources and relevancy.
 - For instance, the area between where food is produced and where that food is consumed in your community, often called a “foodshed,” that follows a watershed or other boundaries
 - You may find that is difficult to find data categorized in this way, whereas political boundaries are commonly used for data
- **Level of Analysis:**
 - What segment of the food supply chain will serve as the focus of their analysis. Will they examine retail-level sales or farm-level sales or both? How will they avoid double counting?

Considering your Goals



- **Economic and Non-Economic Interconnections**
 - Audiences may be interested in specific economic estimates, however, they may also be interested in broader relationships,
 - Any effort to measure spillover or indirect impacts of establishing local food markets and integrating supply chains (also called value chains) should relate to project objectives
- **What approaches might be used to ensure that this work fosters the creation of relevant inter-organizational relationships that advance the broader goals of the study?**

Are economic relationships changing?



- Do farmers, ranchers, and food producers have adequate access to appropriate markets for their product mix, scale of production, and location?
- Do things seem less fair in terms of prices and returns to food system participants?
 - Are food dollars and commercial activity aligned with resource investments, human capital efforts, and innovation?
 - Is there evidence that market structure and negotiation power appear to affect their terms of trade?
 - Is there concern about control in the hands of people outside the community?

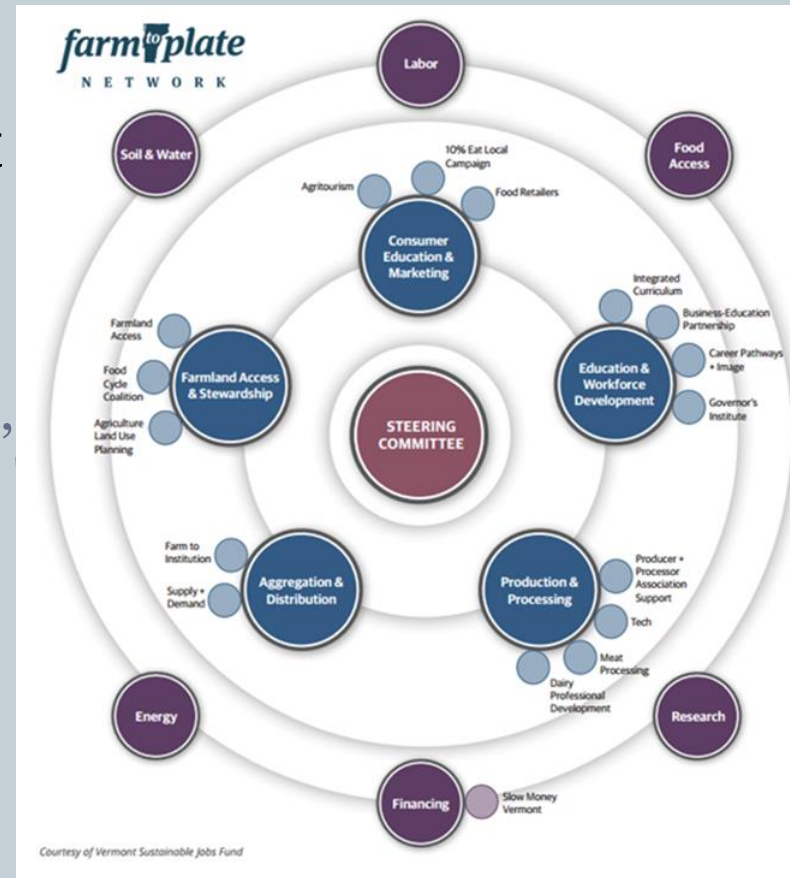
Is Economic Development Focused Well?



- Does the nature of food enterprise ownership matter in your discussion of localized systems?
 - Are locally owned businesses necessarily better than corporate entities?
 - How will you determine whether size, organizational or ownership issues are important to your assessment?
- What type of economic development models are considered desirable?
 - What barriers might exist to shifting the status quo?
- What might the outcomes be of changes to existing economic development/business practices?

Case Study: Vermont Farm to Plate Network

- In 2009, legislature tasked the VT Sustainable Jobs Fund to increase economic development
 - Network embarked on an 18 month process that resulted in the development of a 25 goal, 10-year strategic plan to strengthen Vermont's food system.
- This comprehensive process represents a coordinated approach to a food systems assessment.



Power of Networks in Vermont



- The 25 goals are ambitious but coordinated engagement is key
 - The network is led by a steering committee, which provides overall network governance.
- Well-planned network, divided into working groups with specific strategies and actions.
 - The other members of the steering committee include the chairs from each of its five working groups, the co-chair of the food access cross-cutting team, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, a representative of the Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Board, and a representative of the Vermont Food Funders Network.

Visuals to Engage Your Community



- Visual tools can support enhanced understanding of complex planning and implementation processes:
 - Illustrate crucial relationships, issues, and gaps;
 - Establish boundaries about what sectors, issues, and stakeholders will (and will not) be considered and studied;
 - Provide a means for succinctly communicating project ideas and intentions to community stakeholders.
- We have deliberately chosen to showcase alternative ways for ordering and displaying food system information to provide a range of choices

Figure 1. Food System Framework by Activity, Environment and Macro-Forces

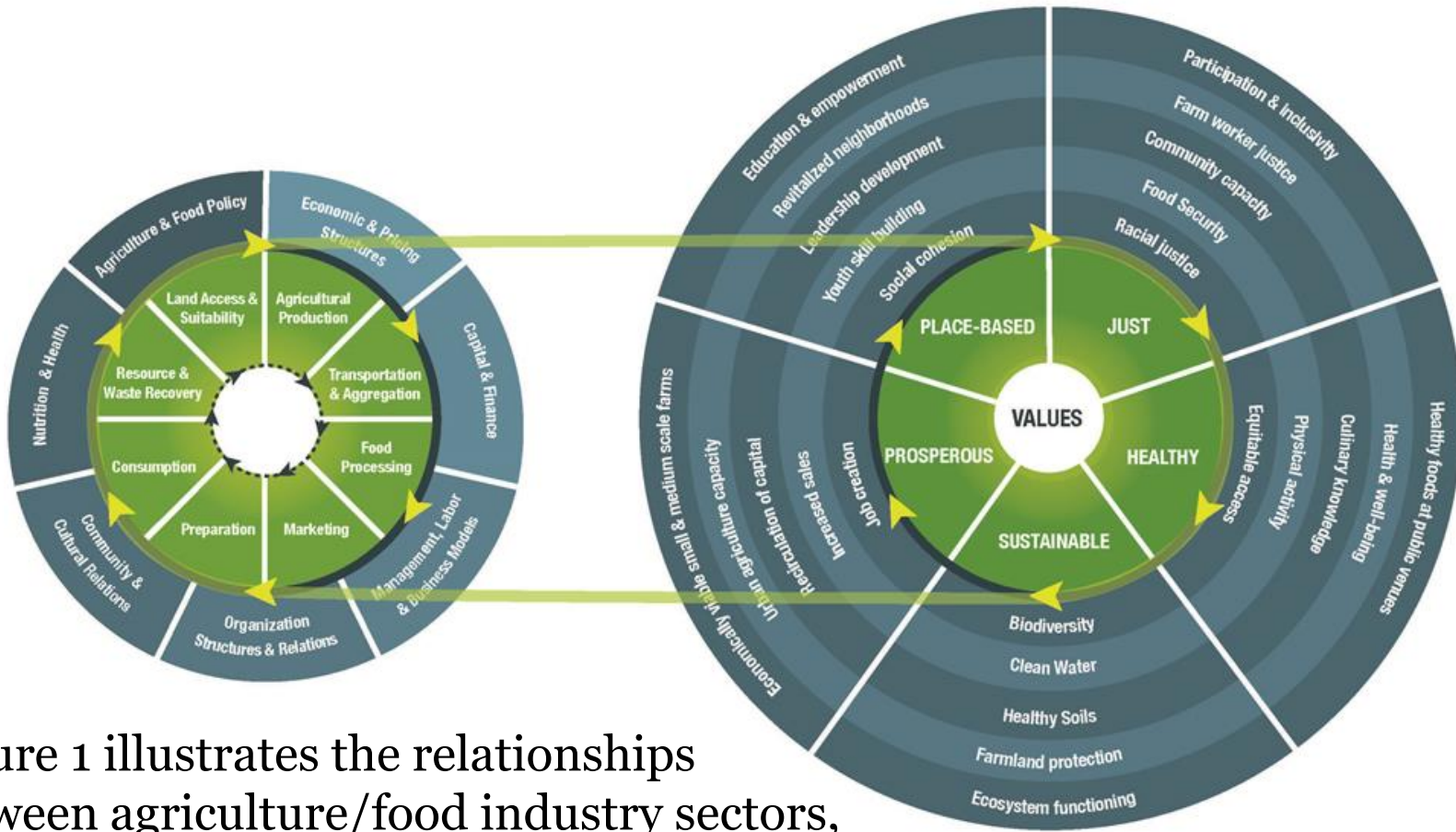
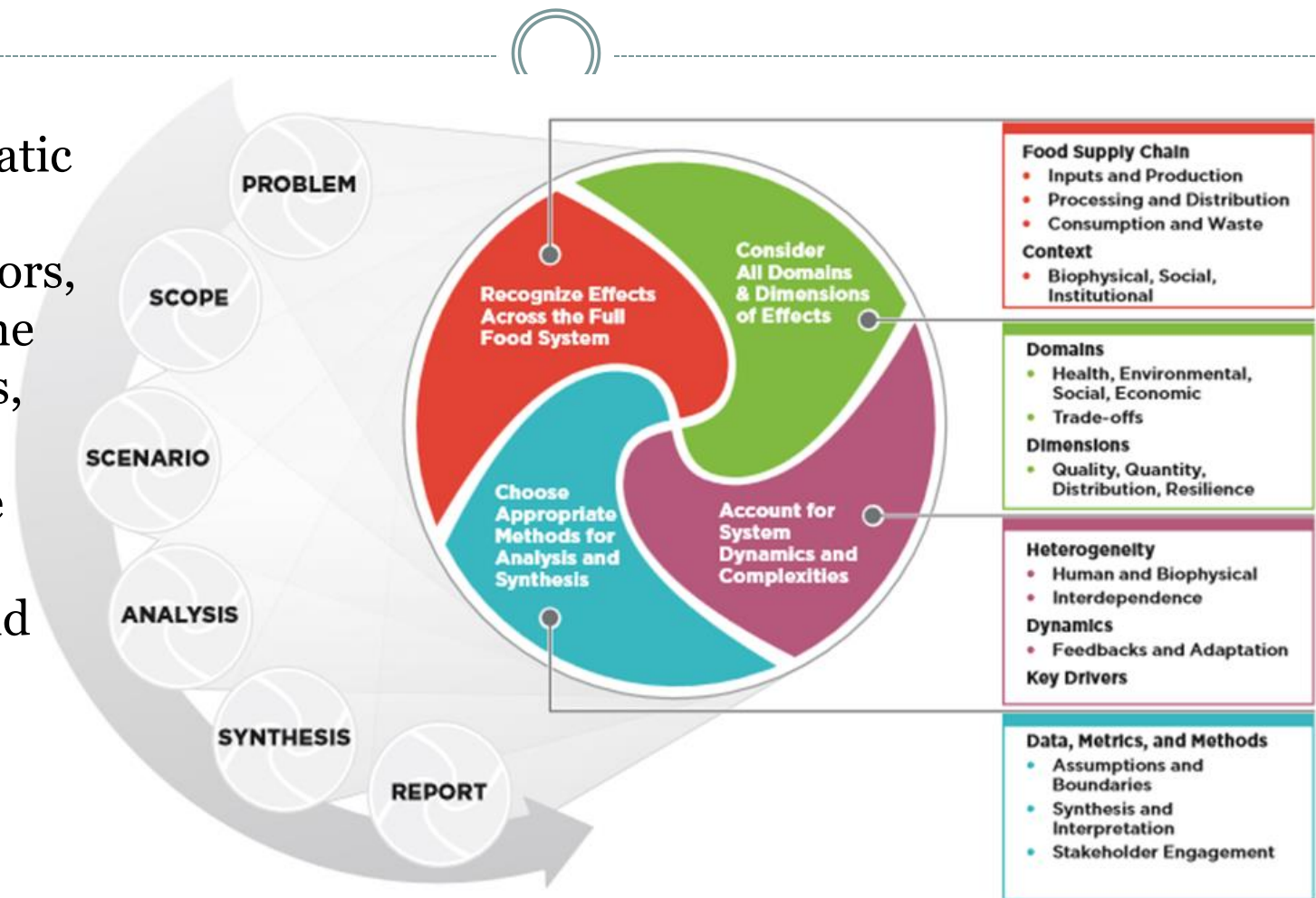


Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between agriculture/food industry sectors, social values, and key public issues

The University of Wisconsin-Madison. The framework also borrows from conceptualizations presented by the C.S. Mott Group at Michigan State University and Virginia State Cooperative Extension, in “A Community-Based Food System: Building Health, Wealth, Connection, and Capacity as the Foundation of Our Economic Future” Bendfeldt, E.S., M. Walker, T. Bunn, L. Martin, and M. Barrow. May 2011.

Figure 2. Assessment Analytical Framework

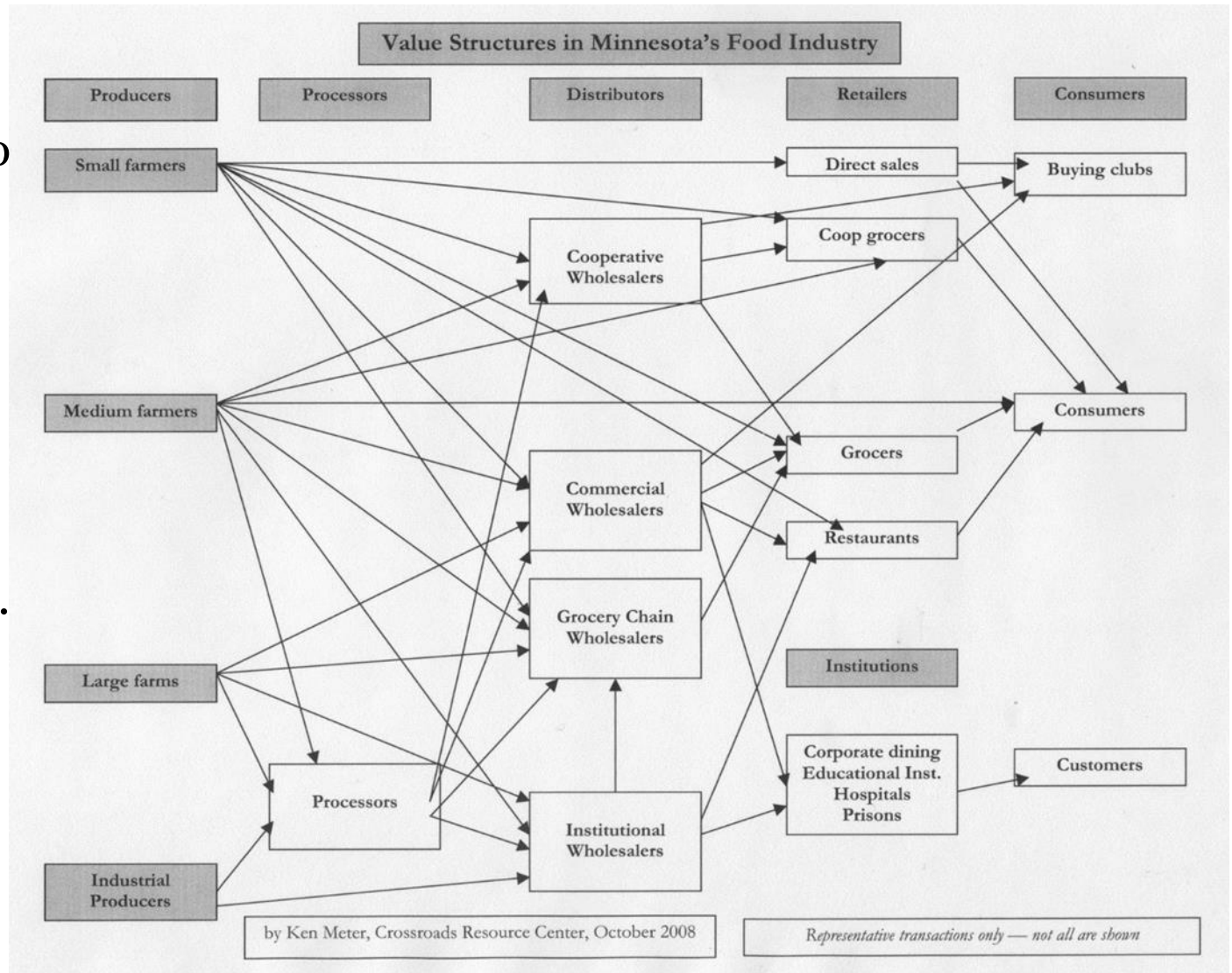
This schematic integrates diverse factors, including the food sectors, dynamics, appropriate analytical methods and the likely domain of effects



Source: National Academies Institute of Medicine Report, <http://iom.edu/Reports/2015/Food-System.aspx>

Figure 3: Minnesota's Food Industry

- Networks and relationships may guide how to fully leverage existing assets & infrastructure.
- May illuminate people and organizations needed in planning process.
- Mapping these connections may be an effective team building exercise for initial meetings.

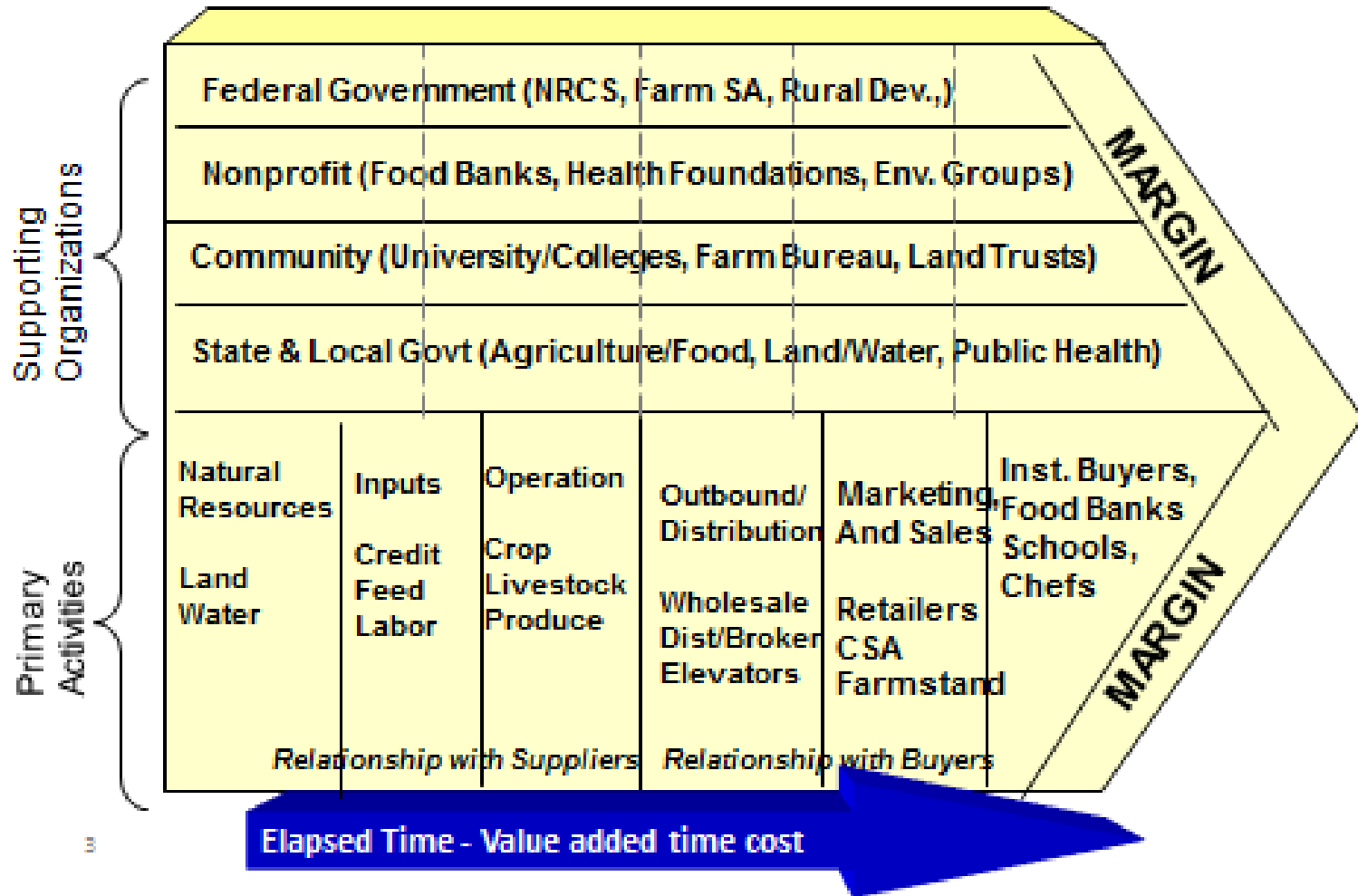


Source: Meter, K. -- Mapping the Minnesota Food Industry

Figure 4: Michael Porter's Value Chain Concept

The Food System

Incorporates supporting organizations, policymakers, and technical service providers that support these businesses and/or industry sectors to strengthen local food system interactions.



Source: Adapted from Michael Porter, Northern Colorado Food System Assessment, 2011

See: <http://www.larimer.org/foodassessment/>

USDA AMS Toolkit- 2015

Using Graphics in your Assessment



- By definition, different members of your assessment team – and your community – will find different types of system imagery attractive because of their varied interests, experiences, and perspectives.
 - Consider using a variety of graphic displays to motivate discussion, appeal to different audiences, help recognize the variety of perspectives that might be important, but not represented.
- Consider one graphical schematic that you can revisit throughout the assessment to orient team members to common concepts and activities, and to communicate externally with stakeholders.

Module 1 Take Aways



- Is there a clear set of planning program decisions, policy changes, or public investments the assessment will help to guide?
 - Are the issues impactful enough to engage a significant part of the community?
- Is the scope of your project inclusive yet focused? Realistic given your resources and timeline?
- Is the team that will guide, conduct, and communicate about your assessment appropriate?
 - Is the team diverse and inclusive enough to identify and add context for the set of food system issues being explored?