

Transforming Regional Food Systems through Agroecology, the Right to Food and Just Transitions

Two-year Postdoctoral Research Position

The UVM Institute for Agroecology is recruiting for a postdoctoral position to work on a participatory action research project focusing on how regional governance can support more just transitions in food systems in New England. The postdoc, working with the [Institute for Agroecology](#) and [Food Solutions New England](#), will lead a project to study historic and current regional governance initiatives and examine the complementarity of two frameworks – the Right to Food (RtF) and Agroecology (AE) – in the governance of food system transformation (Figure 1).



Figure 1: We will focus on the New England region and engage with a multi-scalar governance framework to examine the dynamic relationship between actors, institutions, systems, and policies across multiple scales of governance. This conceptualization will be further developed and refined through this project.

Regional governance involves multi-actor and cross-sector coordination leading to new institutional arrangements, visions, policy change, and markets while fostering democracy, innovation, and strengthening civil society. New England has a robust history of organizing at a regional scale that merits further study. By partnering with Food Solutions New England, the project will contribute directly to impactful and meaningful outcomes in the region while gaining insights that can inform theory and practice elsewhere. The research will be based on the following research questions:

What are the dynamic relationships among interconnected and multi-scaled regional governance processes? The scope, scale and focus of “regional food systems” is interpreted in different ways leading to confusion on how to best govern regional food systems. This project

will examine regional governance as interconnected, nested, and overlapping processes that combine public, private and civic governance (figure 1). It will then analyze the relationships between initiatives working at different scales of regional organization (e.g. local-state-regional) and how these can be effectively coordinated to maximize efficacy and potential for food systems transition.

How have regional governance interventions led to changes in policy and practice, and how has this contributed towards more sustainable food systems? What are the conditions that lead to successful outcomes? We will include an analysis of how race, gender and other dimensions of equity are addressed and how regional governance can better center equity and human rights, including the right to food.

How can the RtF and AE be applied as two complementary frameworks to facilitate the transformative governance of regional food systems? Regional approaches to food systems have often focused on important economic dimensions of food systems. However, there is a recognized need for transformative change in how we conceptualize, practice and govern food systems. In this context, we will examine how AE and the RtF can be used in regional approaches to center holism, human rights and equity, and address the governance challenges at the root of food system challenges (figure 2).

The postdoc will be responsible for coordinating and managing the project and leading the data collection, analysis and dissemination efforts. This will include:

- Coordinating an action-research working group made up of academic and civil society partners
- Organizing meetings, focus groups and convenings
- Conducting in person and online interviews
- Desk review of policy documents
- Critical literature reviews

The successful candidate will be expected to publish in both peer reviewed and creative/public facing outlets. Because the community-based participatory action research project is embedded in ongoing efforts to advance regional governance for food system transformation, outputs will be co-determined with partner organizations and co-researchers.

The postdoc will be expected to participate as a part of the IfA Team, which will include allocating 20% of their time towards institute meetings, professional development, contributing to IfA core programs and other institute-related work. This is an opportunity to join a highly collaborative team, to advance this project work within the wider context of the Institute's vision and mission and to learn through the process.

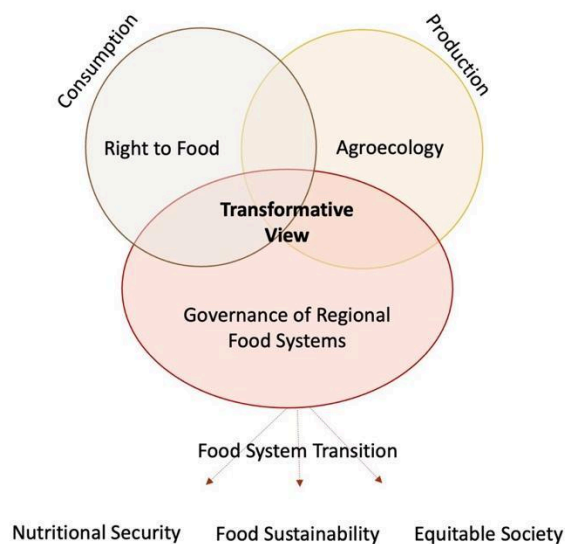


Figure 2 – This research hypothesizes that the right to food and agroecology can be applied in regional governance to facilitate food system transformation. Figure source: author.

Working Environment: Mentorship and Support for Postdoc

The postdoc will be mentored by [Colin Anderson](#) and will engage in a program of professional development and networking with leaders in the Right to Food, Agroecology and regional governance in New England, the USA and internationally. They will be based in the UVM Institute for Agroecology where they will be immersed in a supportive community made up of postdocs, graduate students and faculty. They will be mentored in grant-writing, academic writing, participatory research, project management and cultivating their transdisciplinary research profile. They will be supported by an advisory team, consisting of 4 members from the IfA global community of practice, who will meet bi-annually and will support the postdoc by advising on the research and discussing progress, career plans, and development opportunities. This team includes:

- [Dr. Karen Nordstrom](#). Policy program co-director at FSNE. Co-researcher and advisor throughout project.
- [Dr. Molly Anderson](#). Professor at Middlebury College. Member of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. Co-researcher and advisor throughout project.
- [Dr. Claire Lamine](#). Professor of Rural Sociology (France). Expert on agroecology and territorial food systems. Will host the postdoc in France for a 1-month professional development exchange.
- [Dr. Jasber Singh](#). Associate Professor at Coventry University. Expert on racial equity in regional food system governance.

The postdoc may also have the opportunity to visit a partner organization in Europe for a learning exchange on regional food systems as a part of the Institute for Agroecology's participation in the [ATTER project](#).

What is the IfA

The UVM Institute for Agroecology (IfA) is seeding more equitable and sustainable food systems. IfA uses a systems approach that addresses the root causes of problems in the food system. We challenge the status quo by centering equity, participation and social transformation in our work. Through research, learning, action, and connecting across geographies, the IfA mobilizes knowledge to support agroecology research, practice and movements.

We have adopted three pillars that guide all of our work and underpin our approach to Transformative Agroecology:

Transforming Food Systems for Just Sustainability: Many sustainability approaches emphasize 'technical fixes' that tweak the existing food system without fundamentally changing its structure. In contrast, we focus on processes of social transformation as the primary conduit through which ecologically sound and socially just food systems will finally emerge. This requires systems level analysis and action that integrates ecological, economic, social and political dimensions, and where we attend to leverage points for change.

Participatory, Transdisciplinary and Action Research: The Institute will prioritize Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches, which place the needs and agency of civil society partners (e.g., communities, smallholder farmers, organizations) at the heart of the research process and recognizes the value of diverse forms and sources of knowledge. UVM has deep experience with PAR, which is internationally recognized as a leading approach to knowledge production for agroecology.

Centering Equity: Today's food systems are fraught with inequity and reflect deeply exploitative land and labor relations, gender and racial inequality and an extractive relationship between the global north and south. We recognize that if we are not actively working to change who has power and how we work together in reciprocal relationships, we will be complicit in reinforcing these patterns of oppression.

Compensation

Salaries for Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows at UVM follow the National Institute of Health postdoctoral salary rates and are dependent on years of experience. See here for more information on salary and other benefits (health, dental, etc.):

<https://www.uvm.edu/human-resources/postdoctoral-associates-fellows-overview>

The postdoctoral associate will have access to funds for professional development, presenting their work at conferences and be working with the PI on a fully funded research project that will

support costs for travel, compensating research participants, Article Processing Fees for two open access journal articles and producing public-facing outcomes (a report and a video).

Applying for the Position

This two-year Postdoctoral position will start on September 1, 2024, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Candidates for the position should focus their application materials on explaining and demonstrating how they fit with the following:

- You have successfully completed your PhD (or are near completion) in the social sciences (including geography, rural sociology, development studies, political sciences, anthropology, agroecology or related field)
- Experience in food systems and governance
- Experience in community-engaged participatory research
- Understanding of and/or experience in food systems and food systems governance in the United States
- Experience in centering equity, social justice and critical analysis in research and practice
- Record of publishing outcomes of research in academic outlets and other means (e.g. multimedia, popular media)
- You live in or are prepared to live in Vermont and to conduct extensive fieldwork across the six New England states.

Please submit your application through [this web-form](#) by July 8, 2024. Your application should include one pdf-file made up of:

- a) Your CV
- b) A cover letter (not exceeding 3 pages) explaining interest in the project and any previous experience or expertise pertinent to the project and the bullet points listed above. Please also explain how your work aligns with the three pillars of the IfA.
- c) A sample of a peer reviewed publication or your PhD-thesis and, if you have, a piece of creative writing, a film or podcast that you made
- d) The name, institution and email of two academics who may be contacted as a reference

For further information, you are welcome to contact Colin Anderson colin.anderson@uvm.edu.

This postdoc is funded by the UVM Food System Research Center's [2024 Postdoctoral Fellowship Program](#) under the theme of: *"Food policy and governance for regional food system sustainability and nutritional security."* The successful applicant will also have the opportunity to interact with other postdocs funded through this program and to benefit from the supportive research environment offered by the Food System Research Center.