

Living and Working in Agriculture: Advancing Social Sustainability Across Farm Communities

Convenors:

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Topic:

Demographic shifts in the agricultural and rural communities, along with on-going biophysical, social, political, and economic changes, are raising questions about who will produce our food, fuel, and fiber in the future and under what conditions. An extensive body of literature explores topics connected to economic and environmental sustainability in agriculture (e.g., farm economic performance, optimal production practices, environmental issues, and farmers' adoption of mitigating strategies). Much less often considered are aspects connected to social sustainability, even though social sustainability influences economic and environmental sustainability. Although there is no clear agreement on the definition of social sustainability, we understand it to mean that farmers, farm workers, and their families are able to meet their households' social and economic needs along their life course and are satisfied with their quality of life. Social and economic needs include but are not limited to access to health insurance and health care, childcare, adequate household and retirement income, affordable housing, and food security. Social sustainability is particularly important to consider since agriculture is one of the most dangerous and stressful occupations. It is also one with low profit margins and lower levels of labor, social, and safety protection. Besides impacting quality of life, health and safety challenges have direct implications on the persistence of the farm sector. As such, this proposal directly connects to two of IAWA's third symposium themes, including: 1) attractiveness of the agricultural sector and 2) health and safety.

We invite theoretical, empirical, and discussion paper submissions along with interactive session proposals that explore aspects connected to the social sustainability of farming. Connecting to the Symposium's overarching theme of "Addressing current and future challenges of work in agriculture", this Working Group is ultimately about understanding farm populations' lived realities in agriculture and identifying solutions that support decent and fair living conditions as a conduit to increasing the attractiveness of the agricultural sector.

Themes and sub-themes of particular interest include:

- 1) Health and safety in agriculture and how they interact with social sustainability.

- 2) Farmers, farmer workers, and their families' ability to meet their social and economic needs. Social and economic needs include, but are not limited to, access to health insurance and health care, childcare, adequate household and retirement income, affordable housing, and food security. Also of interest are lived realities with economic, societal, and cultural isolation.
- 3) Programs, resources, and policies that bolster social sustainability in agriculture.
- 4) For all these themes, explore variations in lived realities based on demographic (gender, class, race/ethnicity, age, household structure, farming background, and experiences, role in agriculture (i.e. farm owner operator, family member, farm workers...), farm operation (scale, commodities produced), and contextual (geographic location, availability of resources, types of social and economic policies, labor laws, occupational health and safety regulations, farm input and output market concentration) characteristics.

Aims:

The goal of this working group is two-fold: 1) further the scientific debates on social sustainability in agriculture with an eye towards understanding who works on the farm, under what conditions, and how to best support them and 2) develop new networks of scholars to work towards transnational and transdisciplinary collaborations.

Format:

This WG will combine traditional paper format, panel debates, Fishbowl, and/or World Café sessions. The latter interactive sessions will be used as a space to discuss themes that have emerged during the paper sessions and discuss potential collaborations.