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UB, international partner launch world's first global database of food systems planning policies

Searchable tool allows governing bodies around the globe to see what others have already done

BUFFALO, N.Y. — A first-of-its-kind database developed and maintained at the University at Buffalo will help city, regional and statewide governments around the globe develop better food systems planning policies by drawing from legislation already crafted.

In recent years, many cities around the globe have become more aware of the need to support, encourage and regulate urban and regional agricultural activities, as well as other food systems and land use issues. But governing bodies have not been able to easily learn from other cities because they haven't had a tool to search for existing food policies.

To fill this need, researchers from UB and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Food Systems (RUAF) have launched the Global Database for City and Regional Food Policies, the world's first searchable global database of food system policies.

Ten months in the making, the project was developed by RUAF and UB's Food Systems Planning and Health Communities Lab (Food Lab) and the UB Community for Global Health Equity. The database was conceived two years ago in response to the demand from many cities for support for their own food policy design processes.

The database, which will be maintained on the UB Food Lab website, provides copies of legislation, plans, funding allocations, or other public policy actions adopted by sub-national governments around the world.

Database users can access PDFs of actual adopted and/or enacted policies, regulations, plans and ordinances on a range of food systems topics such as food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management. Researchers from the UB Food Lab and RUAF have populated the database with an initial set of policies. Each policy is coded with a series of categorical search terms that allow users to prioritize the type of policy they wish to find.

The Global Database for City and Regional Food Policies includes categories such as country, language, policy type, food system sector, level of government, population size, and spatial distinction (urban, rural). In addition, the research team assigned a set of keywords to each policy, so that users with interest in general topic areas may search via the basic search tool.

UB's Food Lab also manages the Growing Food Connections policy database, the world's first database of U.S. and Canada-based food systems policies. The GFC database builds on work completed in the United States through the Growing Food Connections project.

Urban and regional food system sustainability and resilience are a growing international concern, researchers say. Governments around the world are grappling with how to build a sustainable, equitable food system for their residents in the face of rapid urban growth, unbalanced food availability, resource scarcity and climate change, among other challenges.

The United Nation's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda recognize that sustainable development cannot be achieved without building more resilient cities. In addition, international declarations like the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact highlight the importance of urban food system policy adoption in achieving resiliency to external shocks.

The policy database will be updated with additional policies regularly. The UB Food Lab and RUAF will engage sub-national policy-makers and planners around the world to submit new policies for database inclusion, provide insight and local knowledge about policies, enhance the coding process, and help disseminate the resource. The Food Lab can be reached at foodsystems@ap.buffalo.edu. RUAF may be reached at info@ruaf.org.