

**UNESCO CHAIR ON FOOD, BIODIVERSITY  
& SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES**

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-24

**SUSTAINABLE FOOD  
FOR A RESILIENT  
FUTURE**



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair on Food,  
Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies,  
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present ***Sustainable Food for a Resilient Future: The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies Strategic Plan, 2020–2024***. The aim of this Plan is to identify the Chair's strengths and areas of expertise as well as the research themes that inform all the work we do. It also lays out a high-level action plan to guide Chair activities to 2024.

In the spring of 2020, over 30 advisors, researchers, community partners, and students participated in a collaborative strategic planning consultation process. The goals of that planning process were to: 1) identify and develop research areas for the Chair; 2) uncover synergies, possible collaborations, and networking opportunities across institutions, researchers, and community partners; 3) inform the creation of the Chair's educational programs and communications planning; and 4) provide input to guide long-term strategic visioning and program planning for the Chair.

We've drawn directly from the input we received from our advisory committee and research clusters to create a vision for the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies' work over the next three years and beyond. It is a privilege to engage such outstanding and enthusiastic scholars, thinkers, doers, and change-makers in ensuring that this UNESCO Chair becomes a platform for transformative and sustainable change. I look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

Sincerely,



Dr. Alison Blay-Palmer  
UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies  
Director, Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems



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# THE UNESCO CHAIR NETWORK

The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies is jointly hosted by Wilfrid Laurier University and the Balsillie School of International Affairs, with Dr. Alison Blay-Palmer as the inaugural chairholder. Led in Canada by the Canadian Commission for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (CCUNESCO), the UNESCO Chairs program promotes international inter-university cooperation in key priority areas for the agency, including the natural and social sciences, culture, education, and communication.

The work of the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies is connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and aligns with CCUNESCO's mandate to build inclusive communities, encourage innovation, and protect heritage and the biosphere. The UNESCO Chair program involves more than 700 institutions in 116 countries and the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies will cooperate closely with UNESCO Headquarters, CCUNESCO, and existing UNESCO Chairs on relevant programs and activities.

## A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE

As a partnership, the Chair will examine sustainable food systems from ecological, cultural, and economic points of view to enable transformative action. The Chair will use its existing and developing research networks to work towards: biodiversity protection; enhanced community resilience; increased opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) communities, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities; and improved food security and well-being for all. The Chair will promote education through new programs and community-based intergenerational learning and cultivate the interface between science and traditional knowledge.





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# PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

## Our Purpose

The purpose of the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies is to:

1. create integrated systems of research, training, and information sharing centred on food, biodiversity, and sustainability; and
2. facilitate collaboration between researchers, educators, students, community organizations, and policy makers in Canada and around the world.

## Our Objectives

The specific objectives of the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies are to:

- **share knowledge** grounded in sustainable food systems initiatives at the community level to create multi-scalar change;
- **use scale-appropriate technology and innovation** to enable sustainable food systems transformation, preserve biodiversity, and build community resilience in the face of climate change and other hazards;
- **build opportunities for marginalized groups**, including BIPOC communities, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities to contribute to increased resilience, biodiversity conservation, and enhanced food security and community well-being;
- **foster education** through new programs and community-based intergenerational learning and cultivate the interface between science and traditional knowledge; and,
- **cooperate closely with UNESCO** and existing UNESCO Chairs on relevant programmes and activities.

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# OUR STRENGTHS



The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies draws on **four main strengths**:

1. excellence in sustainable food systems research,
2. community-based research and learning focused on support for Indigenous and traditional communities,
3. robust food networks and partnerships, and
4. interdisciplinarity

Our strengths facilitate, direct, and inform the breadth of our work and permeate the Chair's research, knowledge sharing, and educational initiatives. They reflect how we do our work and enable us to use the UNESCO Chair FBSS as a platform for change.

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# SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

OUR RESEARCHERS AND PARTNERS ARE GLOBAL LEADERS IN  
SOLUTIONS-BASED SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM RESEARCH



Our network is highly regarded for research that significantly advances conversations and understanding about sustainable food systems. With an international network of innovative scholars, strong food system advocates and practitioners, and students engaged in hands-on work **the Chair uses sustainable food systems as a lens to examine the world's most intractable problems.**

Looking at how community food system resilience, innovative governance, and place-based solutions can impact the ways we think about and build sustainable food systems is especially important to the work taking place across our network.

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# COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH, LEARNING, & IMPACT

FOSTERING LONG-TERM, TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
RESEARCH PARTNERS IS KEY TO OUR WORK



**We are committed to community-driven, community-based, and participatory action research as our central research methodologies.** We follow the lead of communities to co-construct knowledge and work together to find place-based, ecologically regenerative, and culturally appropriate ways to make food systems more sustainable, increase biodiversity, and contribute to community well-being.

We work closely with communities to find the best ways to share research results with relevant stakeholders. Our strategies include hosting events, fostering intergenerational and peer-to-peer learning, and developing community-relevant resources. This approach ensures that the knowledge we co-generate with our community research partners has positive, significant, and lasting impacts on the people and communities we work with.

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# FOOD NETWORKS & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

WE ENABLE INNOVATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING AND EFFECTIVE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM SOLUTIONS BY CONNECTING PEOPLE



**We know that robust networks and trust-based partnerships encourage food system resilience, flexibility, and longevity** by creating opportunities for innovative, place-specific solutions and increased local capacity for diverse communities. By building on existing multi-scalar and cross-sectoral networks, we facilitate solidarity across geographies and sustainable food system movements and support the development of informal and social economies of food.

Through the chair, we identify connections across networks of food system actors and recognize and support community capacity, especially among BIPOC communities, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities. Through systematic communications and knowledge mobilization planning, public education initiatives, and the development of formal educational programming, we enable robust knowledge sharing and contribute to narratives that facilitate meaningful and sustainable food systems change.



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# INTERDISCIPLINARITY

WE CREATE THE SPACE FOR PEOPLE TO WORK TOGETHER  
ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND SECTORS FOR A MORE  
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



**The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies includes a diverse group of scholars and community partners working together** across the social and natural sciences and the humanities to address complex food system challenges.

Our interdisciplinarity provides us with the flexibility, creativity, and adaptability to work across academic and government silos in food research and policy and to uncover new solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges, like climate change, biodiversity loss, and high rates of hunger and malnutrition. By engaging with food system actors across sectors and scales, we can create opportunities for just and sustainable change all along the food system, from seed to compost heap.

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# AREAS OF EXPERTISE



The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies focuses on **three main areas of expertise**:

1. sustainable food production
2. support for Indigenous and traditional foodways, and
3. transitions to just food systems

Our areas of expertise provide a framework for identifying connections between projects and allow us to develop new, thematic networks for more robust knowledge sharing. In other words, our areas of expertise help us to describe what we do.

They also inform our communications planning and research outputs and allow us to draw on our collective expertise in order to better advocate for meaningful sustainable food systems change.

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# SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION

OUR RESEARCH SUPPORTS FOOD PRODUCTION METHODS THAT ARE ECOLOGICALLY REGENERATIVE AND CENTRE COMMUNITY PROSPERITY AND WELLBEING



Sustainable food production uses scale-appropriate and place-specific practices to ensure the environmental, social, and economic well-being of producers, communities, and landscapes without compromising the needs of future generations.

Sustainable food production prioritizes the lived experiences of food producers and looks to traditional and Indigenous knowledge holders for guidance. Sustainable food production methods that incorporate the principles of food sovereignty and the right to food create resilience while conserving biodiversity in rural, peri-urban, and urban spaces.

The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies is uniquely positioned to engage in sustainable food production research, advocacy, and education by building on its longstanding relationships with food producers using agroecological and ecological methods in Canada and around the world.

Through community-led research and knowledge sharing, the Chair will foster innovative and place-based solutions to improve resilience in regional food systems and create opportunities for robust engagement of BIPOC communities, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities in sustainable food production initiatives.

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# SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS & TRADITIONAL FOODWAYS

WE SUPPORT COMMUNITIES TO BUILD THE FOOD SYSTEMS THEY WANT THROUGH COMMUNITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS



Understanding and supporting Indigenous and traditional foodways is fundamental to building more sustainable and equitable food systems around the world. Ensuring that traditional knowledge about the land, food systems, and biodiversity is valued, included in policy, and shared between communities and generations is key to food systems self-determination.

The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies works closely with Indigenous and traditional communities to address the longstanding impacts of colonialism by helping to imagine and build the food systems that communities want. This work hinges on prioritizing Indigenous and traditional ways of knowing and decision-making as well as the recognition that food is at the heart of culture and community resilience.

Through community-led research, the creation of formal and informal educational opportunities, support for Indigenous youth and elders, and increased knowledge sharing across networks, the Chair engages with community leaders and knowledge holders to support sustainable food system initiatives that centre culture, language, and land stewardship. This work builds on the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems' existing trust-based relationships with communities engaged in reimagining their food systems.

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# TRANSITIONS TO JUST FOOD SYSTEMS

WE USE COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING TO CREATE JUST AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN OUR FOOD SYSTEMS



A just food system centres universal access to healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food as a basic human right. Just food systems engage with all actors along the supply chain and prioritize the rights of all people, future generations, non-humans, and the environment. They ensure that people can determine what kind of food they eat, where that food is grown, and how it is processed and distributed. They include democratic processes that see the right to food as the guiding tenet.

The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies works with researchers and community partners in the Global North and South to examine multi-scale structural solutions to address food system inequity. Building on existing cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary networks, the Chair creates opportunities for collaborations that overcome existing barriers to just and sustainable food systems.

Through strategic public education and communications, the Chair helps bring language around food sovereignty, the right to food, and agroecological production methods into everyday discourse. By sharing knowledge through farmer-to-farmer and community-to-community learning, public education, and formal learning opportunities, the Chair supports communities as they build the capacity to transition to more just, ecologically regenerative, economically localized, and robust food systems.

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# ACTION PLAN



Building on our identified strengths and areas of expertise will allow us to meet our program objectives and effectively leverage the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies as a **platform for sustainable food systems change**.

While the specific actions of the Chair will be determined in ongoing consultation with our research and advisory networks and in response to community partner needs and changing global contexts, we have identified five high level strategies to guide our work to 2024.

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# ACTION PLAN SUMMARY

FIVE HIGH LEVEL STRATEGIES WILL GUIDE OUR PROGRAMMING TO 2024 AND BEYOND

**GROW NETWORKS & FACILITATE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS**



**SUPPORT RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS**



**CREATE MEANINGFUL KNOWLEDGE SHARING OPPORTUNITIES**



**CREATE NEW EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING**



**DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS THE UNESCO NETWORK**





# GROW NETWORKS & FACILITATE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

We will build on the work of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems to develop robust interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, multi-scale networks of food systems scholars, advocates, and practitioners. To do this work, we will seek out and facilitate connections among diverse sustainable food system actors in the Global South and North, including community

practitioners, producers, policy makers, students, and researchers.

In all of our work we will privilege the voices of BIPOC communities, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities, and find ways to support diverse engagement in creating food systems that are more sustainable and just.

## KEY ACTIONS:

- Identify and facilitate connections among diverse food system actors
- Create meaningful face-to-face and online networking opportunities for sustainable food system actors
- Enable new ways to share knowledge and food system innovations
- Prioritize the participation of underrepresented communities in sustainable food system change, including BIPOC, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities



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# SUPPORT RESEARCH & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Chair supports the ongoing work of researchers and community partners by helping build capacity for sustainable food system change, especially in our areas of expertise—sustainable food production, support for Indigenous and traditional foodways, and transitions to just food systems.

We will engage in collaborative research and grant writing, enable new comparative work across projects associated with the Chair, and support students and early career researchers.

We will also identify opportunities for new and ongoing research partnerships with diverse communities, prioritizing community-led scholarship and support for meaningful citizen engagement in decision making processes.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is foundational to our work. We will continue to take the lead from our community partners to ensure that our work supports the vital contributions of those creating on-the-ground sustainable food system transformations.

## KEY ACTIONS:

- Engage in collaborative grant writing to support sustainable food system research
- Prioritize and support PAR and community-led sustainable food system research projects to help build community capacity
- Find connections across networks to enable new collaborative and comparative research
- Provide ongoing academic and professional support for young scholars and food systems practitioners
- Create relevant research outputs and tools in consultation with partners



# CREATE MEANINGFUL KNOWLEDGE SHARING OPPORTUNITIES

The Chair will leverage new and existing networks to encourage information flows and the sharing of good sustainable food system practices. We will draw on the wealth of knowledge mobilization expertise that exists within the Chair's advisory committee to highlight research stories that prioritize the voices of community partners, especially those of BIPOC communities, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities.

With the support of the LCSFS we will develop

and implement a robust communications plan and create a dedicated website showcasing the sustainable food systems research excellence within our network. Evaluations will be built into that plan to ensure that our efforts are successful.

Creating new pathways for sharing knowledge will help us amplify the voices of our researchers and community partners and meaningfully contribute to public discourse on sustainable food systems.

## KEY ACTIONS:

- Create a strategic communications plan to identify and reach key audiences
- Create a UNESCO Chair webpage featuring research stories and key outputs
- Write a regular "Notes from the Chair" series connecting Chair activities to broader contexts
- Host public in-person and online events showcasing our researchers and community partners
- Identify and write relevant open access, peer reviewed publications and reports in collaboration with researchers, community partners, and students
- Co-publish relevant policy and opinion papers with CCUNESCO

# CREATE NEW EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

The Chair will create new educational opportunities focused on our areas of expertise and in line with UNESCO's priorities. The centrepiece of our educational initiatives will be new graduate level programming offered through Wilfrid Laurier University that will combine online, in-person, and experiential learning. We will create supports, such as bursaries, for students that may face barriers to participation in postsecondary education.

We will create public education programs that meet the needs of communities and prioritize traditional and Indigenous knowledges.

For instance, we will continue to support intergenerational learning and on-the-land-camps with our community partners in the Northwest Territories and offer technical, promotional, and archival support as needed across projects.

We will leverage our networks to share best practices and educational opportunities. In order to create the best possible educational programs, we will include project specific evaluation tools that measure our successes and identify ways we can adapt to better meet learner and community needs.

## KEY ACTIONS:

- Create new graduate programming associated with the Chair at Wilfrid Laurier University
- Support new and existing community education efforts, especially as they prioritize intergenerational learning and traditional and Indigenous knowledges,
- Co-create educational materials associated with Chair projects and host them on the Chair webpage
- Share educational opportunities with Chair networks





## DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS THE UNESCO NETWORK

The UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies presents us with an incredible opportunity to develop new partnerships across the international UNESCO Chairs network and to work closely with CCUNESCO and UNESCO Paris to identify new networks, resources, and educational opportunities.

In particular, we will work with CCUNESCO to co-author relevant policy and opinion papers to boost the profile of the UNESCO Chair program in Canada and contribute to public discourse on shared concerns, such as preserving biodiversity, enabling transitions to sustainable food systems, and facilitating engagement of BIPOC, women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities in decision making processes.

### KEY ACTIONS:

- Identify potential connections with other UNESCO Chairs and collaborate on relevant projects and publications
- Share research results, educational opportunities, and other relevant information with CCUNESCO and the UNESCO Chair network
- Support UNESCO Biosphere Reserves
- Create annual report on Chair activities for CCUNESCO and Wilfrid Laurier University

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# EVALUATING OUR PROCESS



Tracking the Chair's progress and evaluating our programs will help us adjust to the dynamic needs of our partners and ensure that our work is making an impact.

We will build evaluation processes into our communications and educational programming to measure our progress and track key outcomes. We will also map our networks periodically to understand how they have grown and to identify opportunities to better facilitate connections and engage with marginalized communities.

We will review programs and evaluation processes annually with our advisory committee and CCUNESCO and solicit feedback to help us ensure our research and knowledge sharing programmes are effective and accessible.



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