Regional Food Economies Fellows
Inaugural Cohort - May 2018

Krysten Aguilar - La Semilla Food Center, Anthony, NM

**Bio:** Krysten Aguilar is the Co-Director of Policy and Admin at La Semilla Food Center where she oversees all policy advocacy efforts, and financial & administrative functions of the organization. Krysten led the initiative to get the Las Cruces Urban Agriculture and Food Policy Plan passed - the first of its kind in New Mexico. She is now leading efforts for a county-wide Healthy Food Financing Initiative. She is one part of a four-woman leadership team furthering La Semilla's mission to create a fair and sustainable local food system using innovative leadership models, holistic programming, and food systems work as a tool for racial and gender healing. Krysten holds a bachelor's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Eastern New Mexico University and a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from New Mexico State University.

**Program Description:** The current resources and tools available aren’t convincing local economic development professionals to put food systems development at the center of economic development activities. One analogous model in southern New Mexico that has been successful is the “Monuments to Mainstreet” campaign developed by the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce’s (LCGCC). This campaign makes the case for the positive economic impact of national monuments to the local economy. Instead of convincing local and regional economic development professionals of the economic value and importance that national monuments have in a local community, the Monuments to Mainstreet campaign went straight to the entities that local and regional governments listen to the most when it comes to economic development – local business owners. Building on, adapting, and modifying the model of the “Monuments to Mainstreet” campaign will allow Krysten to both support local and regional food, farm, and food system entrepreneurs and to create an environment where regional planning and development professionals are empowered to put food systems development front and center.

Jen Faigel - CommonWealth Kitchen, Boston, MA

**Bio:** Jen Faigel is co-founder and Executive Director of CommonWealth Kitchen, a commercial kitchen, processing facility, and business incubator in Boston, MA. Jen is responsible for setting organizational strategy, raising funds, wrangling staff and businesses, developing and managing strategic partnerships, and generally managing the chaos. Jen's background is in real estate and community economic development. She was the lead real estate consultant for the $15 million Pearl project, which is now home to CWK's flagship kitchen operation. In her career, Jen has developed more than 400 affordable homes and over 225,000 SF of commercial real estate – worth over $200m – as a driver of job creation and economic opportunity. Her motto in life is: "if you can't ride two horses at the same time, then you shouldn't be in the circus!"

**Program Description:** Since 2014, CWK has been honing their comprehensive, vertically-integrated business and technical services model. Their focus is on building a clear path for aspiring entrepreneurs to start and scale viable food-based businesses by providing wrap-around business and technical support, mentoring and coaching, access to markets, and access to capital, combined with affordable access to commercial kitchen facilities and small-batch manufacturing services. Their model uses strong industry connections as a means to help members gain access to markets and increase earned revenue to create middle-skill urban food
manufacturing jobs and support operations. Through this Fellowship, CWK will better document the case for and impact of their work through economic analysis and compelling messaging, making it easier to secure the resources they need to fully build out and scale the model, and allow others to replicate it.

**Tera Johnson -** Food Finance Institute at University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI

*Bio:* Tera Johnson is a serial entrepreneur whose mission is to create the next generation of regenerative food and farming businesses. The founder of teraswhey®, Tera participated in the full arc of creating and selling a successful investor-financed food company. Now the founder of the Food Finance Institute (FFI) at the University of Wisconsin-Extension and winner of the Chancellor’s 2017 Wisconsin Idea Award, Tera is a frequent speaker, teacher, and financial consultant to sustainable food and farming businesses, social venture funds, and investors. FFI produces a podcast series called Edible-Alpha™ that features Tera interviewing a wide range of food entrepreneurs, funders and technical assistance providers on how to make money in food. FFI also trains technical assistance providers to work with food businesses to build financially viable enterprises.

**Program Description:** Fairfield, IA is a rural community with a population of 10,000 people in southern Iowa. As the home of the Maharishi University of Management, Fairfield is the fastest growing small community in rural Iowa. Unlike most small rural towns across the country, Fairfield storefronts in the downtown area are occupied and young people are shopping with babies in backpacks. People attribute the town’s success to the University, as well as members of the Transcendental Meditation community who visit from all over the world.

In 2003, the town decided to transition the entire community to renewable energy. Today, driving through town, one sees businesses and homes with solar panels all over the city. Next, Fairfield is developing an economic development strategy focused on food and value-added agriculture. In partnership with the Fairfield Economic Development office, Tera’s Fellowship will focus on designing, delivering, evaluating, and developing training materials for engaging a town in a planning and development process leading to high economic impact, scalable and profitable food enterprises, and creating a road map for other communities to follow.

**Sibella Kraus -** Sustainable Agriculture Education, San Francisco, CA

*Bio:* Sibella works at the intersection of sustainable agriculture, local food, economic development, and resilient metro-regions. Sibella directs Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE), an entrepreneurial nonprofit that develops models and frameworks for integrating regional food systems into regional resilience planning and implementation. As part of her diverse career, Sibella directed the Agriculture in Metropolitan Regions program at the University of California Berkeley, a stepping stone for the establishment of the Berkeley Food Institute. Sibella was founding director of the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture. She has also worked as an operations manager for a wholesale specialty produce business and as a cook and special projects manager at Chez Panisse Restaurant in Berkeley. Throughout much of her career, Sibella has worked as a print and television journalist covering regional food and agriculture. In 2014, she received the national Growing Green Regional Food Leader Award from the Natural Resources Defense Council. Sibella holds a B.A. in History from the University of California Berkeley.

**Program Description:** Sibella’s Fellowship will enable her to deepen her work on two interconnected SAGE projects: the Bay Area Agriculture and Food Strategy and San Jose Food Works. Both projects serve to integrate the food sector with community and economic development, one at the regional and the other at the city scale. Both came about through the incorporation of food sector analysis into significant regional and sub-regional economic planning processes.
The goal for the coming year for the *Bay Area Agriculture and Food Strategy* is to convene a Working Group that will develop a roadmap for creating a *Bay Area Agriculture and Food Economic Development Program*, including working with organizations that offer training and education programs across the food value chain to assess whether additional resources could help up-skill the workforce and provide pathways to better jobs. The goal for Sibella’s work in San Jose is to deepen relationships with City and County staff, food and farm businesses, and community-based organizations; to advance development of a proposed wholesale food market; and to link Food Works initiatives with the emerging BAAFS economic program.

**Luis Nieves-Ruíz** - East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Orlando, FL

**Bio:** Originally from Puerto Rico, Luis holds a Master’s Degree in Regional Planning from Cornell University and is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. He currently serves as Economic Development Manager for the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, a council of governments located in Orlando, Florida. Luis’s regional food systems work intersects the areas of economic development and land use regulation with a specific focus on how food production can be used as a tool to revitalize low income communities. As part of this work, he has been awarded $60K in state grants to assess the economic potential of regional foods systems in Orange County and the City of Sanford. Luis is a founding member of the Good Food Central Florida Food Policy Council and also volunteers with several professional and community organizations. His work has been recognized by the National Association of Development Organizations (2017), Next City (2012 Vanguard Class) and Leadership Florida (Connect I). Most recently, Luis was selected to be part of the first cohort of the Urban Land Institute’s Health Leaders Network.

**Program Description:** Through this Fellowship, Luis will complete an inventory of food production assets (agricultural lands, farms, food processors, distributors and other infrastructure) for six East Central Florida counties. Once this analysis is completed, Luis will host a webinar geared towards planners and economic development professionals that discusses ways to strengthen regional food systems and how to utilize them to create economic development opportunities in their communities.

**Mike Ortosky** - Orange County Economic Development, Hillsborough, NC

**Bio:** Mike Ortosky is a landscape architect, soil scientist, planner, entrepreneur, and economic developer. He has been involved in environmental assessment, land planning, site design, environmental restoration, agriculture, and local community and economic development. A graduate of North Carolina State University, he has worked extensively throughout North Carolina. He received a Master’s Degree in Landscape Architecture and during that time co-founded Soil & Environmental Consultants, PA, an environmental consulting and design firm where he was President for five years. In 2008, Mike founded The Earthwise Company, an agricultural development effort. The Earthwise Company’s mission is to reconnect people and planet in an economically viable manner through the development of communities and food systems which reduce dependence on non-renewable energy and provide models of authentic sustainability. Mike has designed and implemented several farm and farm community plans in recent years. In 2014, Mike took a position with Orange County, NC as Agriculture Economic Developer where he is working to develop local and regional opportunities for economic and community development around food systems.

**Program Description:** Mike is promoting and developing a concept for a regional food systems plan for the Triangle Region of North Carolina. Starting with the three main market counties of Wake, Durham, and Orange (home to NCSU, DUKE, and UNC respectively) Mike is working on the initial planning process. Currently, he is working to bring together many disparate (governmental, non-profit, and private) efforts regarding local food and agriculture. Many localities have a genuine intent to improve the system but efforts are often too localized with regard to market demand, supply chain, and resource base. Many of the resources and tools needed to complete the regional food systems model already exist,
just not in a development structure specific to food systems. Through this Fellowship, Mike will create a concept structure and process for developing a regional food system for the Triangle region of North Carolina. This will involve: 1) creation of a program statement, 2) adaptation of known development systems and techniques, 3) identification of the team members and their roles, 4) proposing a concept development collaborative (i.e. who is the entity that will act as “developer”), 5) a general assessment of the political, legal, economic, environmental, governmental, and social layers which will impact the effort and possibly need adaptation, and 6) development of a conceptual procedure model. This effort would be based on outreach to the various stakeholders and fellowship cohorts, and findings would be captured in a “living document” which could be shared with others working in similar efforts.

Trina Ragain - Operation Food Search, St. Louis, MO

Bio: Trina Ragain is the Director of Community Engagement for Operation Food Search, a hunger relief organization focused on ending child hunger and family food insecurity in Missouri. As Director of Community Engagement, Trina is responsible for the organization’s innovative programmatic initiatives and public policy efforts. Trina has over 7 years of experience working on public policy and more than 11 years of experience designing and implementing program and system-level evaluations. Trina has a Masters of Science in Public Health from the University of Illinois.

Project Description: Fresh Rx—Nourishing Healthy Starts is a food prescription program for pregnant women who screen positive for food insecurity. Fresh Rx participants will receive a weekly share of local protein, dairy, fruits, and vegetables for their entire household from Fair Shares Combined Community Supported Agriculture (CCSA) each week of their pregnancy through 8 weeks postpartum. Participants will also have access to one-on-one nutrition support, culinary-based nutrition education, and in-home and online nutrition and cooking tutorials from the Fresh Rx Nutrition Team, as well as receiving supportive services and community resource referrals through the Fresh Rx LCSW Health and Wellness Coach. The goal of the program is to improve birth outcomes for mom and baby and build a case for “hunger relief services” as a reimbursable healthcare expense.

Elliott Smith - Travis County Economic Development, Austin, TX

Bio: As Senior Planner with Travis County’s Economic Development department, Elliott brings an upstream orientation to Central Texas’ food systems development and works to connect the region’s many stakeholders together around a simple goal: grow a fair, inclusive, and wholesome food economy. Drawing on his experiences in philanthropy, community-oriented public health, food waste diversion, and in odd ways Linguistics, he’s a big-picture puzzle-solver who strives to stay connected with the communities in which he works. If he were a vegetable, he’d be garlic.

Program Description: Elliott is designing Travis County’s Food & Farming Initiative – the County’s first comprehensive plan to support the region’s food economy. A number of stakeholders from the many areas that touch the food system either haven’t established relationships yet or don’t see the points of contact in their work. Since he works within the County government structure and because his department is uniquely positioned to convene key players in this arena, he has an opportunity to create and advance an inclusive narrative about the growth of our food system.

Through this Fellowship, Elliott plans to build a dynamic, narrative-driven mapping tool that presents these connections, possible partnerships, and potential impacts to audiences from high school students to elected officials. Using GIS and working closely with community leaders, he will make a story map that can both galvanize stakeholders around strengthening his region’s food assets and catalyze public sector leaders to act to support these efforts.