AgroEcology Fund Strategic Framework
2017 - 2022

Mission statement
We are a force of many and diverse voices, mobilizing resources to build power that transforms food systems and fosters the well being of people and the planet.

Our Shared Vision
In thirty years, robust rural and urban communities with thriving economies will offer dignity and livelihoods for all food producers as well as the ability to adapt to and mitigate environmental change. Biodiversity and the earth’s ecosystems will be conserved not only in wild areas, but in cultivated areas as well. Local cuisine will be celebrated, produced by people gleaning knowledge of agroecology from elders and scientists alike and drawing on the creativity of all. Governments and financial institutions will fully support regenerative and restorative economies and ecosystems as well as rights protections for human beings and nature. Everyone will have access to healthy, affordable, and diverse foods harvested from fair food systems that are governed locally by both producers and consumers.

Cultural diversity and the role of farmers as stewards of natural resources will be encouraged and respected. Fair food economies will be good for people and the planet, leading to the halt of climate change. In thirty years, agroecology will be the model for food systems, while industrial agriculture will be remembered only in history books and museums.

AgroEcology Fund Theory of Change
The primary protagonists at the center of the AgroEcology Fund's theory of change are agroecology movements. They organize constituencies, conduct real-time field research, construct new economy food systems and apply political pressure to win agroecology-friendly public policies and programs. These movements are composed of a diverse groundswell of allied organizations advocating for equitable and sustainable food systems and resisting policies, institutions and vested interests that undermine such systems. The AgroEcology Fund applies its resources to the intersection of these movements, where farmers, consumers, scientists, policy-makers and environmentalists collaborate.

For these localized movements to succeed, collaborations of constituencies must be supported to engage in strategies as diverse and complementary as researching soil carbon sequestration, creating agroecology schools and seed banks, offering new models of agricultural extension, passing local land and water use ordinances, and critically, resisting systematic and intentional barriers to
agroecology, such as corporate control of seed systems. The AgroEcology Fund seeks to fortify these multi-sectoral movements around the world.

5-Year Strategic Directions
(see a complete set of specific actions under “Detailed Strategic Directions”, in appendices below)

1) Shift and Leverage Significant Financial Resources Towards Agroecology
   a) Double the AgroEcology Fund’s (AEF) annual grantmaking pool to $2 million in five years;
   b) Influence private foundation funding (not including AEF grants) to shift $10 million toward AE efforts in five years;
   c) Influence large-scale funding from public sector budgets, leveraging a significant shift of resources (tens of millions of US dollars) toward agroecology in five years.
   d) Develop and implement a plan for AEF to promote mechanisms for leveraging foundation and private sector resources toward agroecology, including impact investing, enterprise loans, etc.;

2) Strengthen Political and Economic Systems to Enable Agroecology to Thrive
   a) Fund grassroots collaboratives that are influencing national policies to support new economy food systems and shift support away from industrial agriculture;
   b) Fund a campaign to halt and redirect a major financier of industrial agriculture;
   c) Develop and implement a strategy to direct bi- and multi-lateral development agencies’ investments toward agroecology;
   d) Design and implement a strategy to influence private foundations and large NGO’s to desist from funding industrial agriculture and redirect resources toward agroecology.

3) Influence the Global Conversation about Solutions to Global Hunger by Amplifying Agroecological Solutions
   a) Extend grants that support and strengthen the communications capacity of grantees to reach and move their targeted constituencies;
   b) Amplify messages and stories gathered from, and co-created with, AEF's grantee partners and allies, featuring focus on science, practice, rights and policy changes;
   c) Use AEF's growing communications capacity and expertise to place messages and stories from around the world in highly visible, strategic outlets in order to inform and advocate for exemplary agroecological practices and policies;
   d) Help shift the dominant narrative about food and hunger, craft and implement a comprehensive communications plan to be a powerful voice in the philanthropy community that provides evidence and inspiration about the viability of agroecological food systems while exposing threats posed by corporate concentration and industrial systems.
4) Co-Create and Share AE Knowledge and Practice
   a) Map actors with whom AEF can collaborate in ongoing relationship to fortify co-
      creation and amplification of knowledge about agroecology;
   b) Implement a monitoring, evaluation and learning system that analyzes learnings about
      agroecological amplification from grantee partners and broadly disseminates key
      lessons to influence fields of development, philanthropy and public policy;
   c) Make grants to advance collaborative learning and knowledge sharing among farmers
      and allies, with focus on integrating practice, science, and policy shifts;
   d) Convene an international learning and knowledge exchange in 2019 among grantees,
      advisors, donors and allies and disseminate conclusions and recommendations broadly.

Background/Context
Today, there is increasing evidence that the industrial food system, dependent on monocrops and
high levels of pesticide, irrigated water and synthetic fertilizer use, is a key driver of biodiversity
loss and environmental degradation, while often producing a flood of low quality food and
leaving family farmers poorer. This evidence is well documented in the 2009 inter-governmental
report by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for
Development (IAASTD).

Across the world, grassroots organizations, NGOs, universities, and public agencies are working
with farmers, consumers and scientists to construct diverse local food systems that are healthy
and nutritious for people and the planet, and are resilient in the face of shifting politics and
climate. Recent Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) symposia on agroecology
demonstrate an important positive trend in advancing agroecology as a response to concerns
about the poor nutrition and lack of sustainability of the global food system.

The goal of agroecology is to grow healthy and abundant food and encourage biodiversity while
renewing the soil and water systems in which food and fiber can thrive. Farming communities
and peasant organizations are leading the way in experimenting with agroecology and measuring
results in healthy ecosystems, livable incomes and yields. Yet funding for agroecology is limited;
public and private funding sources tend to support high-input, chemically-based, technological
research and practices to supply a global market that puts investor profit before social or
ecological well-being. This includes large philanthropic investments such as the Alliance for a
Green Revolution in Africa and official U.S. development aid through programs such as “Feed
the Future”.

The AgroEcology Fund supports grassroots food and farming systems that build on existing local
and traditional culture and knowledge, incorporate scientific advances, and challenge the
institutions that drive industrial agriculture and corporate concentration in the food system. The
AgroEcology Fund was created to offer a model of grant making and learning through which
foundations can achieve more together than they can separately. The AgroEcology Fund consolidates philanthropic resources, strengthens grantee networks, and enables organizations to share technical and advocacy expertise. The AgroEcology Fund works closely with other funder collaboratives to advance learning on agroecological solutions, such as the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, the European Funders of Sustainable Agriculture and Food and the EDGE Funders Alliance.

Today, there are unprecedented opportunities to advance agroecology globally. Agroecology is recognized as both a mitigation and adaptation strategy for climate change. There is a growing recognition of the symbiosis between conservation and agriculture. Conservationists increasingly perceive the importance of guaranteeing small farmers’ land tenure so that they can be effective ecological stewards and guardians of biodiversity. Consumers/eaters are increasingly demanding healthier food and a closer connection to food producers. Social movements around the globe – many with significant leadership by women’s and indigenous organizations – are coalescing in campaigns for a healthy food system built on an environmental and human rights ethos. Worldwide, scientists, grassroots organizations, NGOs, consumers, universities, and public agencies are working with farmers to construct sustainable, just and nutritious food systems based in agroecology. The demand for agroecology is rising.

**AgroEcology Fund History**

The AgroEcology Fund is a multi-donor fund supporting agroecological practices and policies, administered by the New Venture Fund. The Fund aims to support viable food systems, promote the economic well-being of small farmers and their communities, and mitigate climate change through low input agriculture featuring sustainable land and water use. The AgroEcology Fund encourages collaboration locally, regionally and globally among organizations to achieve greater scale and impact in advancing agroecological solutions. With the guidance of an informed, on-the-ground advisory board (the full list can be found in the appendix), the Fund supports effective practitioners, researchers and advocates of agroecology across the world.

The Fund was launched in January 2012 by four founding donors: The Christensen Fund, New Field Foundation, the Swift Foundation and an anonymous foundation. In 2013, the Fund welcomed two new donor partners: The McKnight Foundation and the Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund. In 2014, U.K. funders Synchronicity Earth and the A Team Foundation joined the Fund. In 2015 and 2016, the following organizations joined: the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, the SWF Immersion Fund, the Wallace Global Foundation, the Casey and Family Foundation, the Helianthus Fund, the Peterffy Foundation, the Packard Foundation, the Panta Rhea Foundation, the 11th Hour Project and a foundation which chooses to remain anonymous. The Foundation Charles Leopold Mayer – FPH provided supplemental support for the AgroEcology Fund’s first-ever learning exchange, which took place in Uganda in June 2016.
In its first grant making cycle, the Fund awarded $1,085,000 to six collaborative initiatives (17 organizations). In 2014, the Fund awarded $1,128,000 to eight collaborative initiatives (54 organizations). In 2016, the Fund awarded $900,000 to 10 collaborative initiatives (42 organizations).

In 2015, the AgroEcology Fund hired a part-time coordinator. In 2016, the AgroEcology Fund held its first learning exchange in Uganda, with the active participation of over 70 grantees, advisors and donors. This 2017 strategic plan lays the foundation for new ways of working.

**Principles and Values**

The AgroEcology Fund subscribes to the six principles that inform the work of the Global Alliance for the Future of Food: **renewability, resilience, diversity, equity, health, and interconnectedness**. Our work is guided by a rights-based approach, including women's and indigenous rights, community rights to natural resources, rights to food and water and the rights of nature to continuously regenerate.

We emphasize collaborative approaches in our work, those which have smallholder farmers at their center, working in concert with scientists and policymakers, among others. These coalitions place value on “cognitive justice” wherein diverse knowledge systems, including those of traditional cultures, co-exist and are uplifted and mixed with modern science.

We see agroecology as a continuous process of co-creation among food producers and consumers, together with Mother Earth. At the same time, we understand that unsustainable and inequitable food systems are kept in place by persistent power balances that require powerful and democratic social movements to reform. We believe that agroecology is politically achievable, ecologically sustainable, scientifically proven, socioeconomically viable and essential to restore the health and appreciation of the sacredness of our planet.

**The Evolution of the AgroEcology Fund**

The AgroEcology Fund has evolved during five years of experimentation and practice. Our niche has been resoundingly affirmed: interest in agroecology as a solution to the food, climate, energy and water crises has expanded exponentially. We have grown from 4 to 19 donors in a brief period. The AgroEcology Fund has conducted three rounds of funding, supporting 24 collaborations on 5 continents, resulting in $3 million granted to more than 100 organizations. This work, along with insights gleaned from a learning exchange among grantees, advisors and donors, has brought significant learning into the Fund, and honed our understanding of our particular niche.
Today, our resolve is deeper than ever to support collaborations that advance the science, practice and policies of agroecology, remove the social license from industrial agriculture and strengthen agroecology movements across the world. We commit ourselves not only to continued mobilization of resources to be able to extend grants to key actors, but also to playing an active advocacy role as a community of advisors and donors that will influence colleagues in the fields of development, conservation and human rights. Agroecology is a field of intensive experimentation; we are likewise committed to supporting internal and external processes of deliberate, regular feedback loops and adaptive learning.

After five years of focus primarily on grants to grassroots collaboratives, this plan expands the Fund's leadership to also issue strategic contracts (e.g. to shift the dominant narrative on feeding the world and leverage funds for agroecological movements and enterprises) that will complement and amplify our support to grantees.

The strategic planning process presents an exciting challenge to the AgroEcology Fund's way of grantmaking. New grantmaking protocols have emerged. Proposals to AEF will be submitted in response to request for proposals. As resources permit, the docket will be divided as follows:

- Support to long term partners;
- Support to new partners
- Support for experimental initiatives;
- Grant contracts to carry out specific types of exploration and research and to convene gatherings consistent with the AgroEcology Fund’s strategic plan.

As we acquire a significant pool of multi-year funding, we will consider making multi-year commitments. The AgroEcology Fund will also issue small grants to partners to participate in Learning Events and Conferences. Looking forward, we anticipate doubling our grantmaking budget, investing in communications, advocacy and research, and using our influence to leverage substantial additional resources from other sources.

**Strategic Planning Process**

The impetus to embark on this planning process was born during the AgroEcology Fund's Learning Exchange in Uganda in May 2016. This plan was developed from November 2016 to April 2017 through a participatory process that engaged all of the Fund’s Advisors and Donors, as well as many grantees and allies. Facilitated by Toby Herzlich & Company, the process included a broad survey to gather insights and priorities, stakeholder interviews, a 3-day retreat, and committee work to flesh out initial ideas into robust strategies. In order to learn as much as possible from the natural world that we are aiming to protect, living systems principles were woven into the learning and experiential exercises at the retreat.
The work built upon research conducted during the Uganda Learning Exchange and the initial stages of a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework under development by the i2i Institute.

**Acknowledgments**

This plan is truly a collective effort. It would not have been possible without the active participation in 2016 - 2017 of the grantees, advisors, and donors who have been part of the AgroEcology Fund. We are indebted to our grantee partners who asked us hard questions about AEF’s future plans, offered their ideas and encouraged us to step back and engage in planning. We are honored to support them and inspired by their day-to-day work for a just and sustainable food system. This planning process would not have been possible without the creative and thoughtful stewardship of Toby Herzlich and Marah Moore.

**Appendices**

1. **Advisors**

   - Jahi Chappell, Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University
   - Francisco Rosado May, Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo
   - Sarojeni Rengam, Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific
   - Rajasvini Bhansali, Thousand Currents
   - Angela Cordeiro, Independent Agronomist
   - Edie Mukiibi, Slow Food International

2. **Donors**

   - A Team Foundation
   - Christensen Fund
   - Swift Foundation
   - SWF Immersion Foundation
   - Wallace Global Foundation
   - Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund
   - Casey and Family Foundation
   - McKnight Foundation
   - Fondation Charles Leopold Mayer
   - 11th Hour Project
   - Packard Foundation
   - Panta Rhea Foundation
   - Franciscan Sisters of Mary
• New Field Foundation
• Helianthus Fund
• Synchronicity Earth
• Full Circle Foundation
• Peterffy Foundation
• Ben and Jerry’s Foundation