Affiliation with the Food Systems Institute at the University of Florida

Background:
The University of Florida mission statement emphasizes the commitment to lead and serve Florida, the nation and the world by pursuing and disseminating new knowledge. The Food Systems Institute (FSI) will further highlight UF’s leading role in finding and promoting evidence-based solutions to the greatest challenge of our time — providing safe and nutritious food for a teeming global population while enhancing livelihoods, societies, and the environment.

The FSI is a merger of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS) and the faculty of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems (LSIL). The FSI has expertise in the improvement and management of commodities of terrestrial and aquatic food systems (crops, livestock, fish) that address food security, improved nutrition, and a sustainable environment in the US and globally. Researchers in these teams also have a proven track record in securing and executing large extramural grants in a compliant manner.

What will the institute do?
The Institute combines biophysical, economic and social expertise to explore the multiple outcomes of diverse food systems, and to promote improved systems that exploit synergies and reduce tradeoffs. Research will be organized in four thematic areas and five cross-cutting areas (See appendix 1 for more details).

Why another institute?
• There is no transdisciplinary center or institute at UF that focuses on addressing global food and nutrition security and the associated, health, economic, societal and environmental challenges, which can serve as a one-stop clearing house for organizations interested in conducting collaborative research studies. The Institute will fulfil this role.
• To formalize and exploit the multidisciplinary and complementary expertise of faculty from across campus for developing sustainable and transformational solutions to global food systems challenges;
• To confer eligibility to receive more and varied donor funding and to pursue gifts and endowments;

Who is already part of our faculty team?
The 20 faculty of the Food Systems Institute are affiliated with 12 departments across IFAS, Center for African Studies, Emerging Pathogens Institute, as well as Environmental and Global Health in the College of Public Health and Health Professions. We aim to develop new collaborations with faculty from other departments, centers and colleges across the university.

Outside UF, we have worked with 99 universities of which 42 are in the US, 59 research institutes, as well as multiple government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Why should YOU be affiliated to FSI?
It will allow you to work with a highly motivated group of faculty that has already demonstrated the ability to acquire, manage, and successfully execute multidisciplinary research projects in the US, Africa and Asia.

Next steps:
If you are interested in joining, please send your updated CV to FSI@ifas.ufl.edu. Also indicate the theme(s) to which you would like to contribute. In the email subject line, please indicate “FSI Affiliation – Last name.” You can also reach us at the email address above for further information.
Appendix 1 – Thematic Areas & Cross Cutting Themes

The following thematic areas have been identified based on ongoing and possible future activities:

1. **Global food and nutrition security**
   This area will aim to:
   - Develop climate-smart strategies to improve the level, efficiency and sustainability of nutrient-rich food production and consumption.

2. **Food production and distribution systems**
   This area will aim to:
   - Assess equity of access to nutritious and safe foods and develop strategies to overcome barriers.
   - Evaluate approaches to prevent and curtail the spread of pests and diseases of crops, livestock, fisheries.
   - Identify and develop solutions to market and value chain inefficiencies and constraints in terms of production, equity of food access, environmental impacts.

3. **Health, economics, livelihoods, and society**
   This area will aim to:
   - Assess and address tradeoffs and synergies of food production and diets with livelihoods, economics, health, and social systems.
   - Characterize the gender dynamics around production, preparation, and consumption of nutrient-rich foods.
   - Evaluate nutrition and health impacts of altering factors affecting the production and consumption of nutrient-rich foods.

4. **Food production and the environment**
   This area will aim to:
   - Assess environmental impact of existing and alternative food systems and develop mitigation strategies.
   - Develop more biodiverse, nutrient and water efficient food production systems.
   - Explore routes to ‘circularity’ of food production and food systems.

In addition, there will be 5 cross-cutting themes:

1. **Metrics and tools**
   - Systems analysis approach to food systems
   - Use models to explore possible outcomes of alternative scenarios of food production and food systems.
   - Develop and adapt models to explore possible outcomes of alternative scenarios of household decision making in relation to nutrition, health, and livelihoods.
   - Develop assessment tools that help generate standardized information to measure progress over time.
   - Monitor the different pillars of current and alternative food systems (production, economics, livelihoods, social, and environment).
2. Inclusion and equity
   • Evaluate effects of different practices, technologies, and systems on gender and youth and other marginalized groups.
   • Evaluate opportunities and barriers for engagement of women, youth, and other marginalized groups in food systems.
   • Develop and evaluate strategies that create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and entrepreneurship along value chains in terrestrial and aquatic food systems.

3. Capacity building
   The capacity building will focus on individuals and institutions in the following ways:
   • Support human and institutional capacity development to sustain interventions in the focal locales 1) by investing in (young) stakeholders (particularly researchers) and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to contribute to a sustainable food system; 2) by ensuring institutions have the necessary administrative and financial structures in place to expand and diversify their research portfolio.
   • Build a cadre of young practitioner-researchers that are “raised” through the financial and mentoring support of the Institute including graduate students, postdocs, as well as research fellows in the US and abroad.
   • Explore innovative approaches to strengthen local institutional and individual capacity to support sustainable food systems.

4. Adapting to emerging issues
   • Explore the impact of emerging issues or events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on various aspects of the food systems in Florida, the US and elsewhere.
   • Explore the use of new or alternative technologies and approaches to improve performance of the food system.

5. Enabling environment
   • Explore enabling environments for increased adoption of more sustainable and productive alternative practices, technologies, and systems.
   • Translate evidence-based findings to policy makers at different levels as well as other stakeholders that can influence and catalyze change at different contexts (either state/regional or national level).
   • Engage with policy makers at different levels to inform research activities.