

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Andrew Berardy

Will defend his dissertation

Finding the Future of Food: Sustainable Consumption Lessons for and from Veganism

Abstract

Advancing sustainable food systems requires holistic understanding and solutions-oriented approaches that transcend disciplines, so some expertise in a variety of subjects is necessary for sustainable food consumption. Proposed solutions are usually technically or socially oriented, but disagreement over the best approach to the future of food dominates the dialogue. Technological optimists argue scientific advances are necessary to feed the world, but environmental purists argue that reductions in consumption and waste are sufficient and less risky. Life cycle assessment (LCA) may help resolve the debate through quantitative analysis of environmental impacts from products which serve the same function. LCA used to compare dietary choices reveals that simple plant-based diets are better for the environment than diets that include animal products. However, analysis of soy protein isolate demonstrates that certain plant-based proteins may be less preferable for the environment than some unprocessed meats due to the additional impacts that come from industrial processing. LCAs' focus on production risks ignoring consumers, but the food system exists to serve consumers, who can be major drivers of change. Therefore, the path to a sustainable food system requires addressing consumption issues as well. Existing methods for advancing sustainable food systems that equate more information with better behavior or performance are insufficient to create change. Addressing food system issues requires a level of expertise where the consumer has sufficient tacit knowledge to understand how arguments are framed, what the supporting content is, the findings of primary sources, and complex and controversial dialogue surrounding innovations and interventions for food system sustainability. This level of expertise is called interactional competence and it is necessary to drive and maintain progress towards sustainability. Development strategies for interactional competence can be informed by studying the motivations and strategies utilized by vegans. A new methodology

helps advance understanding of expertise development by assessing levels of expertise and reveals insights into how vegans maintain commitment to a principle that influences their daily lives. The study of veganism and expertise reveals that while providing information to debunk fallacies is important, the development of tacit knowledge is fundamental to advance to a stage of competence.

Monday, April 20th, 2015
2:00pm
WGHL, Room 401

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Dr. Thomas Seager, chair
Dr. Christine Costello, member
Dr. Mark Hannah, member
Dr. Christopher Wharton, member
Dr. Amy Landis, member