The Agrifood System Policy Research Domain: Informing the governance of the alternative agrifood movement

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Motivation
To bridge the gap between the alternative agrifood policy research domain and alternative agrifood practice.

What is food policy?
“Food policy encompasses the collective efforts (or lack of efforts) of governments to influence the decision making environments of food producers, food consumers, and food marketing agents in order to further social objectives” (Timmer et al., 1983, 9).

Agrifood system policy uses the frame of the alternative agrifood movement:

So, what’s the problem?

• US food policy has traditionally been considered a national domain, dealing with issues such as public health, nutrition, anti-hunger, food safety, food labeling, international trade and food aid.
• More recently, food policy practice has shifted to alternative arenas, such as community food security and civic and sustainable agriculture, at alternative scales, mostly local and state, and by various disciplines.
• What has been deemed the “alternative agrifood movement” has resulted in a new area of policy practice, which is well ahead of research.

Our approach
Through three types of analysis, we examined 259 alternative agrifood policy oriented publications:

• Bibliometric analysis
• Knowledge network analysis
• Domain visualization

What we found

Rate of publishing is increasing.

Publishing is in all four Scopus subject areas.

Subject Area | Scopus Subjects | # of Pub
---|---|---
Social Sciences | Social Science, Life Sciences | 163
Agricultural and Biological Sciences | Life Sciences | 91
Environmental Science | Physical Science | 73
Medicine | Health Science | 62
Nursing | Health Science | 38
Economics, Econometrics and Finance | Social Science | 16
Arts and Humanities | Social Science | 14
Business, Management and Accounting | Social Science | 14
Energy | Physical Science | 12
Earth and Planetary Sciences | Physical Science | 6

Articles draw from a core knowledge, with 75% of publications sharing citations with agrifood policy articles.

The most common scale of governance for publications is local.

What this means

• Agrifood system policy research is an emerging subfield.
• The agrifood systems policy research domain exists in an “invisible college,” publishing in interdisciplinary journals and across all major subject categories.
• There are three distinct sub-areas of agrifood system policy research, although research draws from a common core of knowledge.
• The most highly cited publications are all connected via citations.
• The alternative agrifood policy research domain has a decided focus on local governance, which differs from traditional food policy research
• Most research is concerned with agenda setting, which further supports the emerging nature of the subfield.

Next steps

A practice-informed research agenda is needed that:

• Builds a more cohesive agrifood systems policy research agenda by exploring research opportunities to connect the research clusters of rural development, local and direct markets and urban food access, nutrition and health.
• Continues to focus on legitimizing this type of research through agenda setting, but in the future should include implementation and evaluation studies of the existing agrifood projects and programs.
• Gains attention from public policy and management community, the general thought-leaders in academic research in the field of public affairs.

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