

Digging Deeper to Enhance the Understanding and Choices of Policy Issues

Madison Food Policy Council

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Issues with Understanding the Concept

- Conflating of food supply chains with food systems
- Speaking as if there is only one food system
- Mistaking actual food systems for aspirational ones
- Confusing traditional work on food issues with work on food systems

Systems Thinking – What Is It?

- “A set of synergistic analytic skills used to improve the capability of identifying and understanding systems” (Arnold & Wade, 2015)
- A sensitivity to the circular nature of the world
- An awareness of the role of structure in creating the conditions we face
- A recognition that there are powerful laws of systems of which we are unaware
- A realization that there are consequences to actions of which we are oblivious

Source: Goodman, 2018

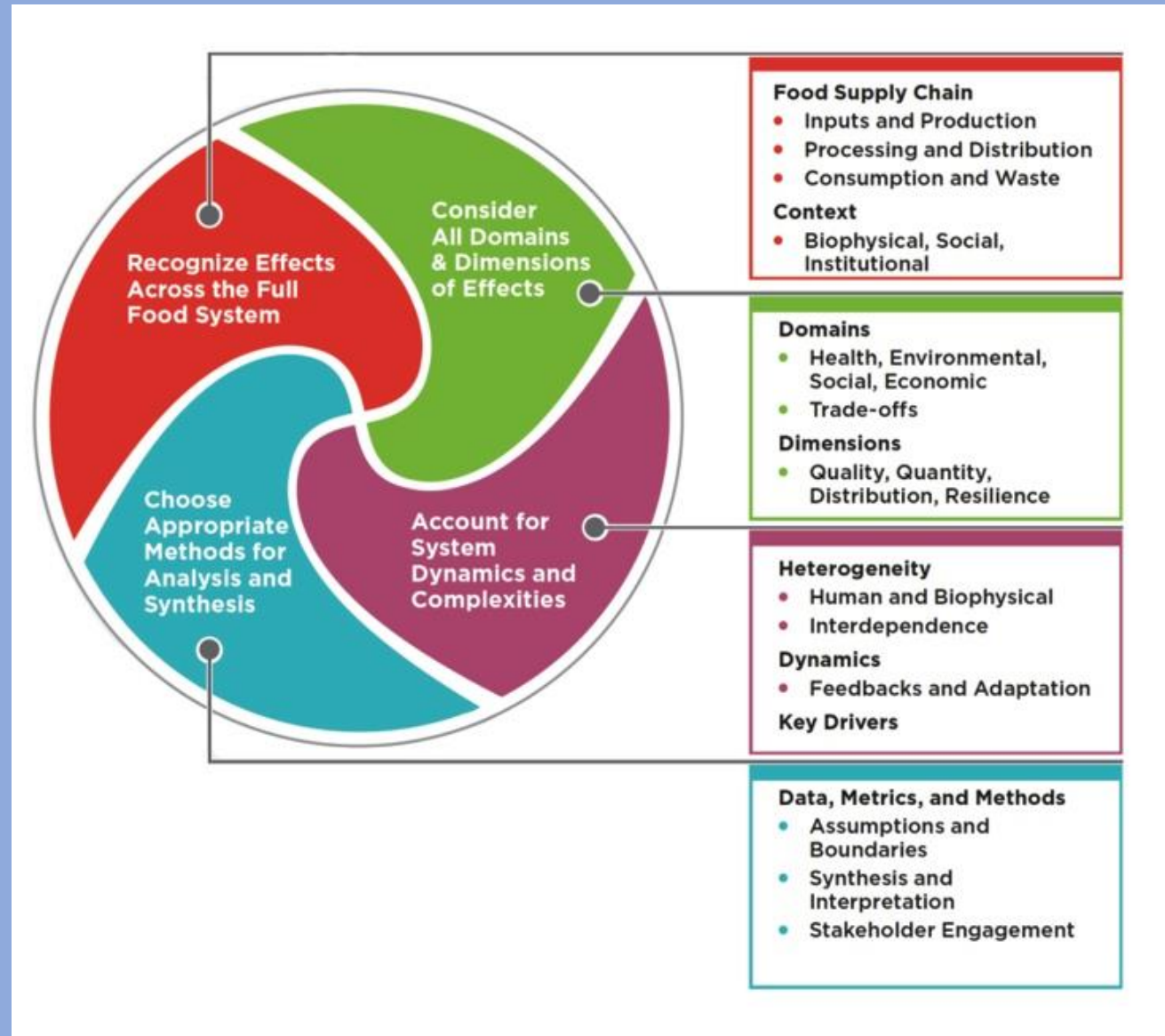


Systems Thinking – Why Use It?



- Requires more logical and comprehensive thinking about the structure and function of a system
- Replicates the real world to better understand its complexity
- Expands range of choices for solving problems
- Anticipates the impacts of trade-offs
- Recognizes that there are no perfect solutions

Systems Thinking – How to Use It?



Source: A Framework for Assessing the Effects of the US Food System. IOM and NRC. 2015.

Framework or System Used

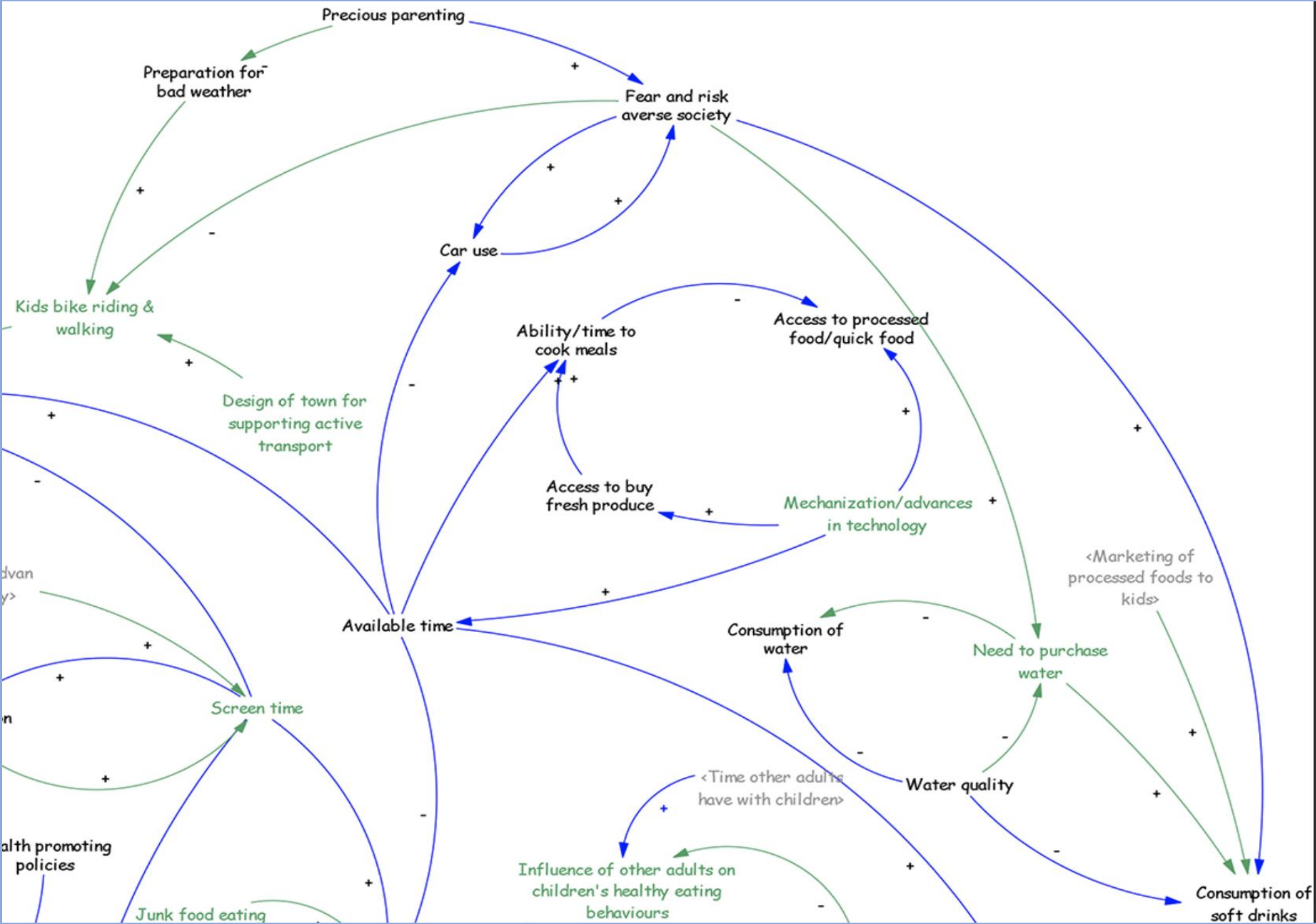
5 sectors		4 foundational values			
		Economic opportunity	Improvements in public health	Social equity	Environmental quality and sustainability
	Acquire and steward land and capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assets: • Challenges: • Recommendations: • Actions/Actors: 			
	Grow/Harvest				
	Process/Store/Transport				
	Market/sell/use				
	Food system development, coordination, evaluation, funding				

Source:
Otten,
2015

Some Steps on Deciding Which Policies Offer the Best Solution to a Problem

1. Develop a framework that links the interaction of relevant factors to guide decisions

A Causal Loop Diagram Related to Obesity Prevention



Source: Allender et al. A community based systems diagram of obesity causes. PLoS, 2015.

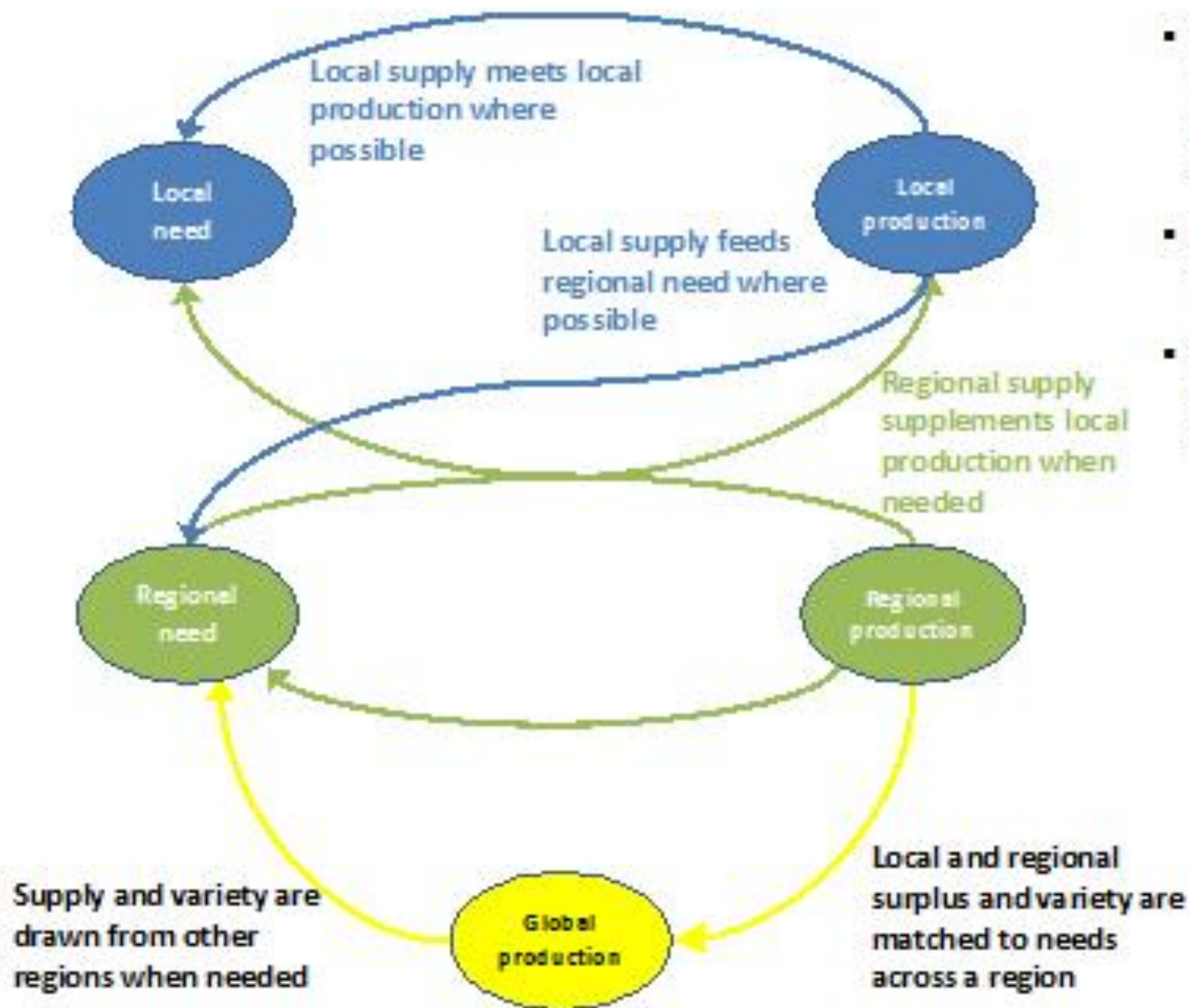
Some Steps on Deciding... (Continued)

2. Become educated about the specific problem at the deepest possible level

“One hypothesis that making healthy food more available and unhealthy food less available will itself lead to changes in diet requires further empirical investigation”

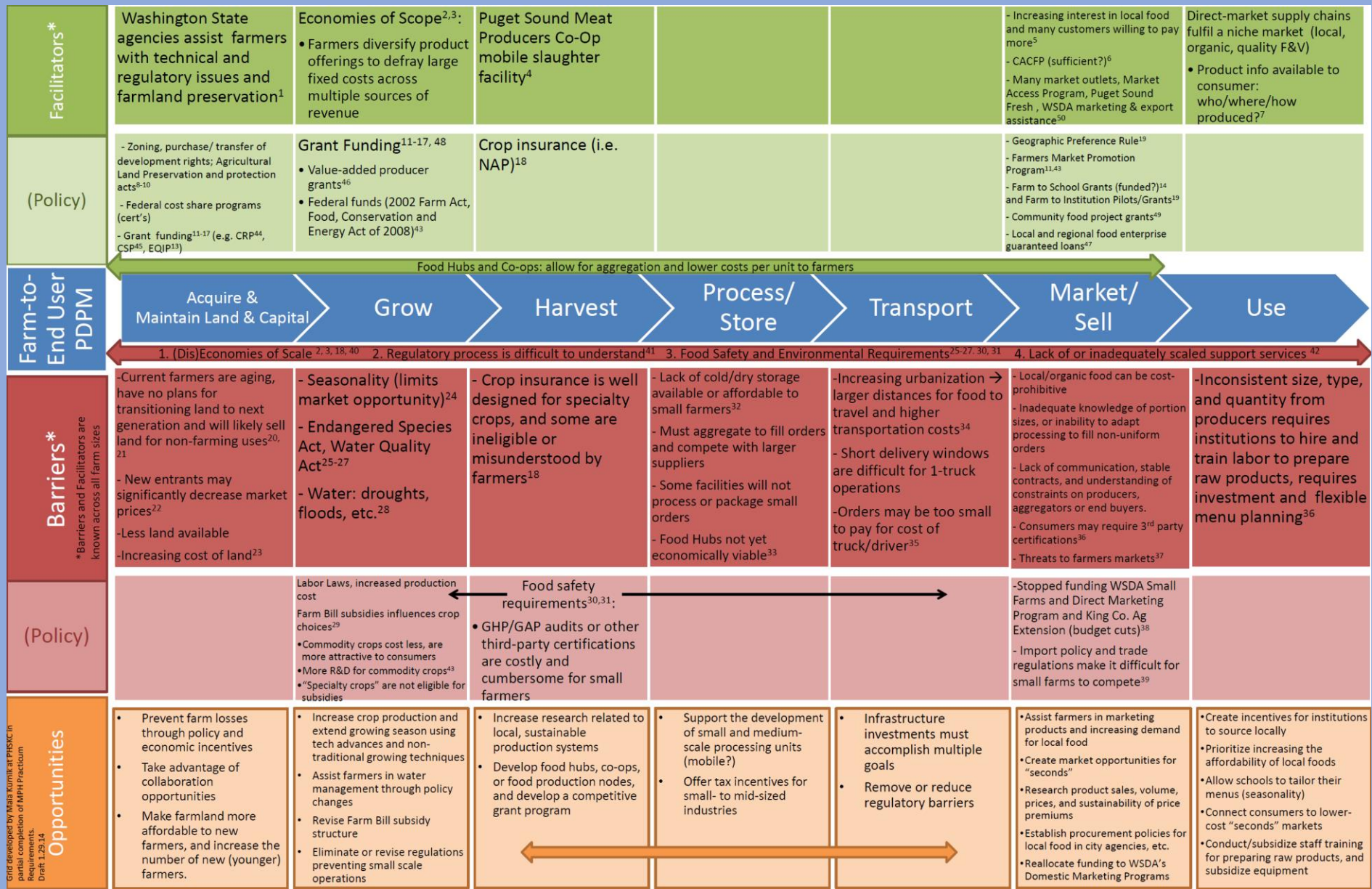
Some Steps on Deciding... (Continued)

3. Always think across scales



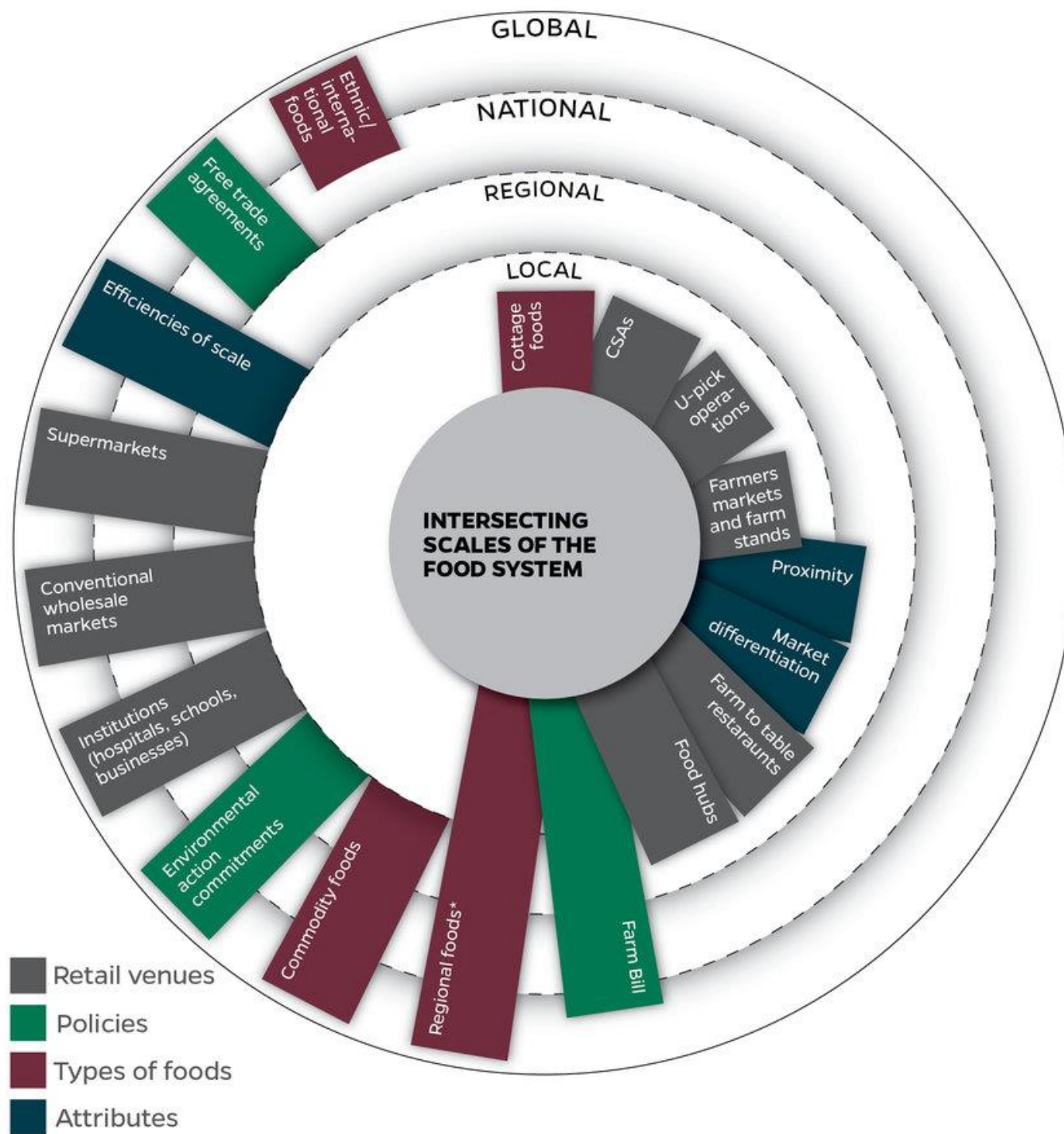
- Optimize supply chain length to match local production on regional and inter-regional scale
- Match surplus and variety to needs
- Capital flow can extend to and from local nodes.

Process-Driven Policy Mapping



Source:
Otten, 2015

Grid developed by Mala Kuriak at PRSKC in partial completion of MPH Practicum Requirements. Draft 1.29.14



Source: Palmer et al., 2017

Some Steps on Deciding... (Continued)

4. Develop indicators of intended and unintended change

“Most metrics chosen are outputs, not outcomes...don’t determine if programs are working”

5. Conduct evaluations/feedback

“For the most part we have little information on what is working and not working and what is the collective impact of our multiple efforts”

Examples of Processes Used by Other FPCs

- Use different committees to vet options to bring to core groups
- Strong assessment process; food plan; update every year

“Failure to develop formal and informal processes for rational food policymaking puts the entire enterprise at risk”

A Few Recommendations

- Let form follow function
- Have a governance committee – is structure working?
- Have at least one voice that keeps stepping back – seeing bigger picture
- Don't let advocacy or ideology get in the way of good choices
- “Developing comprehensive city, state and regional food and agricultural plans is an essential prerequisite for identifying and filling policy gaps that enhance sustainability”