

Conversation with Virginia Clarke of Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, June 4, 2014

Participants

- Virginia Clarke - Executive Director, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders
- Eliza Scheffler - Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Virginia Clarke.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Virginia Clarke as part of its investigation of animal agriculture. Ms. Clarke discussed the interests of grantmakers in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, as well as the types of programming it offers. Ms. Clarke also mentioned two smaller funder groups: the Animal Agriculture Reform Coalition and the Food and Farm Communications Fund. Finally, Ms. Clarke shared some thoughts on opportunities for philanthropy within animal agriculture.

Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders

Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders (SAFSF) is an international network of grantmakers that are actively supporting sustainable agriculture and food systems, as they define it. Within this broad topic, their funding falls under many different interest areas: animal agriculture, beginning farmers and ranchers, climate change, environmental protection, farms to institutions, farmland protection, food access, genetic engineering, health, immigration, investing, labor, local and regional food infrastructure, organics, pesticides, policy at the local, state, and tribal levels, policy at the national and international levels, social justice and racial equity, toxics, urban agriculture, and water quality.

Very few grantmakers have portfolios wholly dedicated to sustainable agriculture; most work on food systems within other programmatic areas such as the environment, social justice, or health. In addition to the interest areas above, some focus on particular strategies like communications and media or research.

Ms. Clarke said that there are a number of grantmakers within the broad SAFSF network who share an interest in affecting animal agriculture. She went on to say that

many grantmakers would not fund work on animal agriculture because it is outside the scope of their mission, or they are limited by geographic focus or interest area. Animal welfare is a less popular interest area for SAFSF grantmakers than other areas such as school food, health, or land conservation.

SAFSF as an organization

SAFSF has grown considerably over the last decade with 5 funders supporting the organization in January 2003 and over 85 formal members in 2014. Based in California, SAFSF has 4 full-time and 1 part-time staff. SAFSF's primary purpose is to network and educate the broad philanthropic community on issues of primary interest to the grantmakers. SAFSF hosts an annual Forum each year in different locations around the U.S. in addition to hosting on-going learning conference calls, webinars and making resources available to funders via its website and a funder-only listserv. SAFSF has 2 special projects:

Creating Common Ground (CCG) is an initiative that connects grantmakers working at the nexus of food, agriculture and health and is a partnership between SAFSF, Grantmakers In Health, and the Convergence Partnership. SAFSF is launching an annual policy briefing in December 2014, which will take place in Washington, D.C.

Animal Agriculture Reform Coalition

The Animal Agriculture Reform Coalition (AARC) is a group of grantmakers that has formed over the last 18 months and has been meeting regularly during that time. The foundations involved in this work represent private foundations, corporate foundations, health foundations, individual donors, investors, and impact advisors.

Food and Farm Communications Fund

The Food and Farm Communications Fund (FFCF) is a small group of grantmakers who coordinate their funding for communications and media projects. FFCF has gone through 2 rounds of funding.

Opportunities to affect animal agriculture

Ms. Clarke shared a few ideas about what philanthropists could do in the animal agriculture space:

- Ms. Clarke said that immigration reform and labor laws are food-related issues that deserve more attention; she does not know of any grantmakers currently working on labor within animal agriculture.
- Regulating the use of antibiotics in farmed animals: There have been many successes, but more could be done with outreach to public health and medical professionals.
- Funding nutrition education for medical professionals about the health impacts of eating meat could have a positive impact on animal welfare.
- Funding media that broadcasts the personal stories of actual small farmers and ranchers could build support for smaller-scale agriculture.

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