Title: **Building University-Community Partnerships for Sustainable Food Systems in China**

Brief: Waterloo researchers and students co-hosted workshop with Chinese agroecology practitioners and academics in Beijing to strategize sustainable transformations for China’s food system

In mid-August 2017, U of Waterloo professor Steffanie Scott and her research team co-organized a two-day workshop with 45 Chinese researchers, students, farmers, community partners, and NGO leaders in Beijing. This dialogue highlighted drivers of and barriers to the transition from uniform industrial food systems to diversified agroecological ones. Participants shared their perspectives on ecological agriculture, underscoring its diversity in China and its contributions to equity and the environment.

Mr. Zhou Zejiang, president of the Asia division of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), spoke about Organic Agriculture 3.0: “Organic agriculture is commonly known by what we exclude. But IFOAM defines it as what conserves soil and health, and respects natural laws and biodiversity. Let’s focus less on the external inputs and more on what organic means, especially the four principles of health, justice, ecology and care.”

Steffanie Scott, with Balsillie School postdoctoral fellow Zhenzhong Si, adapted for a Chinese context the framework from a [2016 report of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems](http://www.ipes-food.org/images/Reports/UniformityToDiversity_FullReport.pdf) (IPES), and identified eight key obstacles, or ‘lock-in factors’, that impede a sustainable transition in China’s food system. These include, among others, an overemphasis on modernization and productivity, and discrimination of the peasantry.

Dr. Song Yiqing from China’s Centre for China Agricultural Policy differentiated industrialized, industrializing, and pre-industrialization agricultural zones in China, and called for policy approaches to be catered for each region. Dr. Wang Songliang from Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University spoke of how to incorporate ecological values into economic analyses. These suggestions demonstrate the value of balancing social justice, ecological integrity, economic assessment, and regional differences. Keynote speaker Hannah Wittman from the U of British Columbia provided examples of farm to school programs in Brazil and British Columbia.

Farmers and social organization reps at the workshop shed light on transformations on the ground in China. Two farmers spoke of their difficulties in introducing ecological farming to rural communities where chemical farming has become the norm. After completing universities studies in the city, they returned to their villages to start farming. In a moving testimony, one farmer explained how, rather than perceiving farming as hard work, he saw it a process that made him peaceful and confident. Yet, even though they have learned to farm ecologically, they found it hard to justify their practices to fellow farmers and family members. Organizers from two new farmer training centres observed that although technical training for ecological agriculture is gaining momentum, we need inclusive networks to develop solidarity among ecological farmers. To overcome the destructive effects of rapid urbanization on villages, a [Devotion to Homeland centre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Rural_Reconstruction_Movement) has been created that aims to rekindle rural culture.

The partnership between participants has continued to grow since the culmination of the workshop. Participants are keen to seek opportunities to bridge people-centred thinking with technical expertise to scale up and scale out sustainable food practices in China. To facilitate this, Steffanie Scott is working with several [partner organizations](http://www.pcd.org.hk/en) in China to prepare a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant application.